

JESUS BY LUKE

"As Seen by a Gentile Physician"

Paul B. Smith

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BY
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JESUS,
BY
LUKE

“As Seen by a Gentile Physician”

Paul B. Smith

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All scripture quotations in *Jesus, By Luke* are taken from the King James Version of The Holy Bible unless otherwise indicated.

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Dedication

Dedicated with love to Herbert and Johanna Weinzettl, who have made a significant contribution to our television ministry for nearly twenty years — see pages 62-63.

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Foreword

This powerfully practical book is a must.

Well-researched and biblically sound it breathes the air of the marketplace, the factory floor and the college playing field.

I've had the unique privilege, together with other members of the congregation of The Peoples Church, to hear the truth expounded, challenges made clear and the evident passion for souls touching our hearts and minds. The compassion and fine eye of Doctor Luke has been ringingly but deftly set forth and highlighted so as to make one feel that Christ himself were walking the streets and lanes of our city.

How I rejoice, as an adult Bible teacher, to see the dust of history swept aside and to see in sharp relief the Perfect Man, the Second Person of the Godhead touching the eyes of the blind, the debilitated sinews of the palsied, opening silent ears, making fresh the skin of the leper but above all warming our sometimes cold and doubting hearts.

How unforgettable are the images that people this book, brimming with humanity. Consider the heart-leaping realism of the thief on the cross, or the thrilling walk of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Feel the sadness in our Lord's question "Where are the nine?" Glance up the tree at Zacchaeus, and down in the ditch at the prodigal son, yet rejoice in God's goodness and mercy when they both supped in the warmth of "The Father's house."

The reader will be led to a closer walk and more effective witness as he or she experiences the perfect humanity of Christ drawn lovingly and tenderly from the pages of Luke's gospel by the senior pastor of the church that puts World Missions first.

This book completes the quartet of insightful expositions of the gospels. For me, being familiar with Dr. Paul's ministry

over many years, I see in this work a unique melding between the humanity of Christ as revealed in Luke's gospel and "the human touch" which epitomizes Paul Smith's preaching. His understanding of the hurts and heartbreaks of humanity not only touches the pews but heaven itself.

A marvelous opportunity for pastors, and also, the general reader.

Russell B. Wells
President
Wells Gordon Associates Limited
September 16, 1990.

Part One

The Magnificat — Chapter 1

The Inn — Chapter 2

The Inauguration — Chapter 3

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Luke 1:46-50

Chapter 1

The Magnificat

One year before he was murdered by some of his own army officers the Roman Emperor, Lucius Domitius Aurelian, declared December 25 to be a feast day to celebrate the birthday of the Unconquered Son.

Aurelian was the Emperor of Rome from 270 to 275, and he referred to himself as the “restorer of the world” (Resitutor Orbis), because he did a great deal to reunite a very disintegrated empire. He was responsible for building a new city wall that was 12 miles long and 20 feet high, a great deal of which still is standing.

Our celebration of Christmas on December 25 actually comes from three different Roman celebrations held at about the same time of the year. December 17, the Saturnalia, was a time when the Romans celebrated with a great deal of frivolity and they also exchanged gifts. December 25 was

regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness. January 1 was the Roman New Year and on that day their houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to the children and to the poor. It was not until the 4th century that Christians began to celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25.

Some people become very concerned because we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on a day that used to be a pagan holiday. However, in reverse, people who are not Christians at all take holidays at times that are strictly Christian — such as Christmas and Easter. The reasoning is that there is no point in creating a new holiday when there is already one in existence that will serve the purpose. The German yule log and their custom of eating yule cakes were originally to honour Thor, the god of Thunder. If a time machine were to put us in Germany or Scandinavia when they were celebrating the birthday of the Unconquered Son, we would probably say, "It must be Christmas!"

Among the Puritans in early America a strong stand was taken against all of these forms of celebrations because they were pagan in their origin. For a while the Puritans even banned mince pies. But over a period of time most Christians have realized that evergreens, lights, singing, gifts and food are the ways that we celebrate any event, and that these things are not wrong in themselves. For *whom* we celebrate is the important thing — not *how*.

If we were to ask a hundred people what Christmas means to them, we would get quite a variety of answers. Some would think in terms of the Scandinavian/German Yuletide with its logs and cakes and fellowship. Others would think of hospitality: "that's the time we keep a sort of open house. We want people to feel free to come and visit us. We want them to know that we're a friendly family." Others would think primarily of the food — particularly the Christmas dinner. Our mouths water as we think of the turkey, the stuffing, the cranberry sauce, the gravy, the sweet potatoes and the plum pudding. That's the day we all forget about our diets. Some mention the Christmas tree, traditionally an evergreen as that tree has always been a symbol of survival. They were not introduced to Great Britain until the 19th century, although they had been used in Germany long before. The word *Christmas* comes from the latin words *Cristes Maesse*

which means “Christ’s mass.” Still others would think about the spirit of good will that seems to captivate everybody — baskets of food for poor families, carols sung while a light snow falls on our shoulders, and people opening their front doors to listen and watch, and family reunions of folk who have not seen each other since last Christmas. Of course for most children Christmas centres around Santa Claus and new toys.

These would certainly be some of the answers and there would probably be many more, but I often wonder what the Virgin Mary’s answer would be: “Mary, what does Christmas mean to you? You were there for the first one. As a matter of fact there would not have been any kind of Christmas celebration if it had not been for you.”

At this point some Protestants become a little nervous. We tend to avoid any reference to the Virgin Mary or we entirely ignore her. The renowned theologian Alexander Whyte (1837-1921) made this comment: “We must give Mary her promised due. We must not allow ourselves to entertain a grudge against the mother of our Lord, because some enthusiasts have given her more than her due.”

Mary was a woman of dedication and great faith. Gabriel had asked her to believe some incredible things. And she believed them so strongly that her cousin, Elisabeth, exclaimed: “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb . . . And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Lk. 1:42,45).

If we wish to see Christmas through the eyes of the Virgin Mary we should read that part of the Christmas story that we call *The Magnificat* (Lk. 1:46-55). She said this before the divine baby was born. I would think these words came back to her every time she saw him, and in particular, during the days after his death she must have thought of these things many times when she remembered his birthday.

Suppose we were to be fortunate enough to speak to the Virgin Mary today and ask her the question, “What does Christmas mean to you?” I am sure that she would say at least three things that are taken directly from *The Magnificat*.

1. Christmas is the time we celebrate the birth of the Mighty God in the form of a man: “For he that is mighty has done to me great things.”

More than 290 times the Old Testament describes God as "the Lord of Hosts." This is a military term that is used to emphasize the power of God. David puts it even more emphatically: "Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Ps. 24:8-10).

We are living in a desperate world. As I write these words someone else is kidnapped and held hostage in El Salvador. Lebanon seems no closer to peace than it has been for a dozen years. Terrorists are exploding bombs in many places in the world. Highjacking is a constant threat to those of us who use the airlines. Starvation has hit almost every country of Africa that borders on the Sahara Desert. People are dying in a three thousand mile strip from the west coast to the Red Sea, as well as many other places in the world. The Soviets continue to keep millions of people imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain, and South Africa keeps other millions imprisoned behind an identity card which forces them to live separately from other citizens in their own country.

What the world needs now is not the baby in the manger, but the *Mighty God*, the Lord of Hosts. I believe that is one of the things the Virgin Mary would say about Christmas if we were to ask her.

2. Christmas is the time that we celebrate the birth of the *Holy God*: "Holy is His name."

Names are far more important among Jewish people than among most others. To the Jew, the name is the person. That is why most Jews avoid saying certain forms of the name of God. *Holy* is not what God is like. It is what God is. The *Mighty God* was born in the body of a man. The *Holy God* was born in the body of a man.

The birth of Jesus means more than the birth of a person who had raw power. It means the birth of one whose power was holy —that is, a power that would ultimately cause all things to work together for good. What will finally prevail in this world *will be the purposes of the God-child*, "Holy is his name." That is power that produces purity.

3. Christmas is the time that we celebrate the birth of the *Merciful God*: "His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation."

I am sure Mary knew that all of us need the mercy of God or else we would all die in our own sins — including her. She knew that we cannot pay our own bail, we cannot forgive our own sins, and we cannot save our own souls. Even the Virgin Mary could not do those things for herself or for us. Perhaps it was Christmas day when Charles Wesley wrote these words:

'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For O my God, it found out!

Looking through the eyes of the Virgin Mary at Christmastime we should be celebrating: 1) the power of God “He is mighty,” 2) the purity of God “Holy is His name,” 3) the pardon of God — “his mercy is on them that fear him.”

Can we hear the voice of the Virgin Mary: “Christmas is not a big feast. Pagans were doing that long before I gave birth to Jesus. If you have never done so, may I suggest you leave your turkey and go and find God. Jesus is not a helpless human baby. The baby is just the vehicle through which God moved into this world. Jesus is the Lord of Hosts of the Old Testament. He is the Mighty One of Israel. He has the power to change our lives.”

But Mary speaks again: “Christmas is not an evergreen tree and presents and good will. The people of the Roman Empire had all that before Jesus was born. Christmas is when a Holy God came to us in the body of a baby: ‘made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men’ ” (Phil. 2:7).

But Mary speaks a final word: “Christmas is not just standing on the street and singing carols. Pagans celebrated for their dead gods by singing. My Son was not born to teach us how to sing. He was born to die on the cross and to rise again from the grave so that he could pardon us from our sins.” If we were to read the words of the carols carefully we would find that this is their theme:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

Isaac Watts

Then peeled the bells more loud and deep:

God is not dead: nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.

Henry W. Longfellow

Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild;
God and sinners reconciled.

Charles Wesley

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend on us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.

Phillips Brooks

Perhaps the best presentation of what Christmas really represents is found in the words of a song written by the Minister of Music of The Peoples Church. Dr. David E. Williams put it this way:

I thought it was the tinsel
I thought it was the tree
That girls and boys and fancy toys
Made Christmas real to me.
But one day I discovered
How wrong I'd always been:
For there was something missing,
Couldn't find out what it was,
'Til someone showed me Jesus,
And I trusted him.

Now you may say you're happy,
That Christmas really swings;
It's party time and all the world
Forgets its woes and sings.
But, O please let me tell you,
There's so much more than this:
For you're still missing something.

That can turn your life around.
That something is my Saviour,
And I tell you this because . . .

It isn't Christmas
Until you know the one who came so long ago:
It isn't Christmas,
Until the Holy Child becomes your risen Lord.
It isn't Christmas,
Until the Christ of Christmas lives within your heart.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David: To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

Chapter 2

The Inn

The Jews resented that they had to pay taxes to the Roman government. Joseph probably shared a rather intense animosity against the Roman Empire along with the rest of his countrymen, but there was no way of avoiding it. For this particular taxation he had to journey all the way from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south because the tax had to be paid in the towns where the people had been born. In all probability, as far as the law was concerned, Joseph did not have to take Mary with him on this trip. However, Joseph and Mary had only been married for a very short time and she was already in her ninth month of pregnancy. To have left her in a small town like Nazareth would have been very difficult for her because she would have been the brunt of no end of slander and gossip. At any rate, Joseph took Mary with him.

Bethlehem was a little more than seventy miles due south of Nazareth, but because of the Samaritans most Jews would avoid the direct route. Joseph and Mary probably went the way most Jews in those days would have gone — that is south on the eastern side of the Jordan River. This would make their journey considerably more than seventy miles.

Bethlehem was known as the City of David because it was there he was born and reared. It was just twelve miles west of Bethlehem in the town of Socoh that David had killed Goliath. It was near Bethlehem that Ruth had gleaned in the fields of Boaz. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived fifteen miles south of Bethlehem in the town of Hebron, and it was there they were buried. Joshua had made the sun stand still near the town of Gibeon which was ten miles north-west of Bethlehem, and the city of Jerusalem was only six miles north of Bethlehem.

Joseph and Mary made this very long and difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem only to find that the town was crowded with people — probably those who had come to pay their taxes as well as the Roman officials who were to collect the taxes. As a result there was no room at the inn. Of course, the inns of those days would have no resemblance whatsoever to the hotels, motels or inns of our times. Generally they consisted of a series of empty rooms laid out in a square around a court yard. Travellers would carry their own bedding with them as well as their food. The doorway of the rooms would open toward the courtyard where their animals would be tethered and where their food would be cooked.

The only place Joseph and Mary could find was a stable — probably attached to the inn. Some think it was a sort of cave. This was where Mary gave birth to Jesus. There is no evidence she had help from anybody else except, of course, Joseph. The Bible says that when the baby was born she “wrapped him in swaddling clothes.” In the Greek language this is just one word — *esparganosen*, followed by the pronoun him, *auton*.

For many years I used to think of this as describing a baby loosely wrapped in something like a blanket, but almost the opposite is true. Swaddling clothes consisted of a square piece of cloth in which the baby was wrapped, but from the corners of this cloth there were long strips of cloth which were used to bind the baby securely. Apparently these strips were wound around the baby's body from its shoulders to its feet —

somewhat like a mummy. Some years later it was discovered that this practice could actually injure the baby, but when Jesus was born it was still in practice.

There is nothing in the story to indicate the innkeeper was rough or mean or angry with Mary and Joseph, and that was why he would not find room for them. It was simply because there were too many others taking up the space and keeping him busy. This is true of many people in the world today. They have no place for Jesus Christ in their lives — but not because they are agnostic or atheistic or angry with him. It is simply because their lives are filled with too many other people and they are busy about too many other things.

Even if we were to accept the government statistics about the religious persuasions of the people in the ten largest countries of the world, we would quickly discover that by far the majority of these countries have little, if any, room for Jesus. China is the largest country in the world with more than a billion people. There may be thirty million Christians in China but this represents only three percent of the population. Out of India's 750 million-plus population, Hindus and Muslims account for more than 721 million. The USSR has more than 277 million people, and 142 million of these are registered as atheistic or non-religious. In the United States, more than 200 million out of a population of 240 million claim to be Christians of some kind. Indonesia has a population of approximately 168 million and of these more than 140 million are Muslim.

Brazil's population is about 136 million and about 130 million claim to be Christian. Out of Japan's 121 million more than 110 million are Buddhist/Shintoist, and less than two million claim to be any kind of Christian. With a population of more than 98 million, Bangladesh registers more than 97 million of them as either Muslim or Hindu. Pakistan has somewhat more than 100 million people, and more than 97 million of them are Muslim. Finally, Nigeria's population is more than 96 million and 46 million claim to be Christian while 43 million are Muslim.

I have quoted these figures directly from the charts in the 1986 issue of the Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year. Some of the statistics for Christians, however, would be in the category of what I sometimes refer to as "card carrying" Christians; that is, people who are identified by their

governments as Christians simply as a way of distinguishing them from people of some other major religion in that country. Or the people may be called Christians simply because their country is one of those in the world known as a Christian country. This would be true of Brazil where nearly the entire population is Roman Catholic, but I doubt if even the Roman Catholic Church would refer to some of these as Christians.

However, even if we take the statistics as they stand in the Year Book, only three out of the ten largest countries in the world have a majority of Christians and seven of these countries have a vast majority of non-Christians. In other words, seven out of ten of the largest countries in the world would not have room for Jesus — and their religious statistics show it.

On the individual level many of us do not have room for Jesus Christ because we do not wish to comply with his teachings. From this standpoint there are really only two options open to us. We are limited to a choice of two different ways of life or two philosophies. There is the philosophy of Satan and the world and there is the philosophy of Jesus Christ and the Bible. Stated very simply the philosophy of the world is that I do what I like, go anywhere I wish and live my life in whatever manner pleases me most. In the last half of the 19th century Alfred Lord Tennyson expressed it in his poem, "The Round Table." He puts the words in the mouth of Enid:

Frown and we smile, the Lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

Probably the best known poem along this line is by William Ernest Henley who also wrote during the latter half of the 19th century:

It matters not how strait the gate
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Of course this whole concept was expressed in the popular song that Frank Sinatra sang, "I Did It My Way."

The philosophy of Jesus and the Bible is quite different from this. We are not expected to do whatever we please but rather, whatever Christ pleases: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

There are many who have no room for Jesus because the work ethic of the Bible is too high. Jesus compared his followers to salt, and told them if they did not do what they were supposed to do they were of no value to him whatsoever: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Mt. 5:13).

Paul told the Thessalonians that if people were able to work and refused to work they should not have the privilege of eating: "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2Thes. 3:10).

Some of us have no room for Jesus because his teaching about material prosperity is too tough. We should guard against an accumulation of wealth and material things here — particularly if we have not stored such an accumulation in heaven: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Mt. 6:19-20).

I do not believe this is a condemnation of rich people. There are some with whom God can entrust a great deal of money and possessions. Rather, he is warning us against that kind of an accumulation of wealth that makes it impossible for us to fulfil our obligations to God. Many of us are too busy to go to church. We are too busy to help the poor. We are too busy to teach a Sunday School class or to sing in the choir. Jesus tells us that if we are too busy to do these things and many other things that we should and could be doing, then we are too busy. We are laying up treasure for ourselves, but when we get to heaven we will be poverty-stricken, because we have been too busy: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (Jn. 6:27).

Some of us have no room for Jesus in our lives because we

are unwilling to accept his financial policy. Jesus did not condemn riches in themselves, but he did say it was difficult for a wealthy person to get to heaven, probably because sometimes rich people tend to become misers: "Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him. Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Lk. 18:22). In this story which is repeated by Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus gives a very extreme answer to this young man. He insisted that he sell all that he had. This is not always the case. Zacchaeus gave away only half of his wealth: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor" (Lk. 19:8). Jesus did not condemn him because he did not give everything he had to the poor. As a matter of fact he is commended by Jesus: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (Lk. 19:9).

There are a number of other wealthy people mentioned in the New Testament, but they are not condemned because of their wealth. Among these would be Joseph of Arimathaea: "When even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple" (Mt. 27:57).

It would seem to me that the home where Jesus stayed in Bethany every time he went to Jerusalem was owned by relatively wealthy people. It is unlikely that Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus were not at least comparatively wealthy. Apparently they had extra space in their house where Jesus could stay and probably, his disciples also.

Undoubtedly Lydia of Thyatira was a wealthy woman. The Bible refers to her "household," which would indicate she had servants, and apparently sufficient room to entertain Paul and his companions. We know that Paul was then travelling with Silas and probably Luke. After her conversion the first thing Lydia did was invite Paul and his colleagues to stay with her.

Nicodemus belonged to the Jewish aristocracy. He is described as a "ruler of the Jews." We know he was rich because he joined Joseph of Arimathaea in burying the body of Jesus after the crucifixion: "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight" (Jn. 19:39).

Only a very rich man would be able to afford this large amount of spices with which to embalm the body of Jesus. Indeed this may have been a fulfillment of the prophecy in the Old Testament that says: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad" (Ps. 45:8).

There are a great many more rich and righteous men in the Old Testament. Among these would be King Solomon and Job. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to the wealth of Solomon: "And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Mt. 6:29).

The story of Job is centred around his great wealth: "His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3).

God permitted the devil to strip Job of everything that he possessed, but in spite of this great loss Job remained faithful to God, "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8). Notice, this was God's description of Job *before* he lost his wealth, not after.

After Job had come through this period of testing God gave him twice as much as he had owned before the testing.

The Bible does not condemn wealth, but it does warn us to be careful that our wealth does not become an obstacle to our righteousness. Jesus stressed that we should make sure we have at least as much in the bank of heaven as we have in the banks of earth.

It should be stressed, however, that righteousness or spirituality do not *make* us wealthy as far as material things are concerned. By far the majority of Christians throughout the world are not wealthy. As a matter of fact, some of the most spiritual are very, very poor. *Spiritual* is not synonymous with *rich*, *righteous* is not synonymous with *wealthy* and *pure* is not synonymous with *prosperity*. I have met people all over the world who are extremely poor — indeed, sometimes starving, but there is no doubt that they are much more spiritual than many of the people I have met in my own country.

The teaching of Jesus and the Bible about material prosperity is extremely tough — perhaps more so for wealthy people than for poor people. However, this teaching for many of us leaves no room for Jesus.

Another area of our Lord's teaching that leaves no room for Jesus is his definition of greatness. Jesus was very definite about the fact that greatness should be measured in terms of servitude. In order to be great in the kingdom we must be willing to serve others: "But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant: Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:26-28).

At another time Jesus said almost the same thing in different words: "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mk. 9:35).

The apostle John brings out this principle vividly when he tells the story of the Last Supper. It was at that time that Jesus took a basin full of water and a towel and proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples. This was the task of a slave, and the disciples were absolutely overwhelmed: "So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:12-15).

The apostle Paul understood this teaching. He often referred to himself as a servant and urged those to whom he wrote his letters to be servants one to the other. He pointed out to them that the greatest example of this principle was the life of Jesus Christ himself: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:5-7).

That is why we often refer to pastors as "ministers." No matter how large our congregation may be we should never lose sight of the fact that we are there to be of service to the people. We are not there expecting our people to think that we are important or great. Sometimes there are members of my staff who refer to me as the "boss." I do not like this expression, and whenever I hear it, I try to point out the fact that there is no boss in The Peoples Church. As the Senior Minister I am expected to lead my people, but not to boss my

people. There is a great deal of difference. What a sad thing it is for a minister to be so impressed by his own importance that he leaves no room for Jesus.

Many of us allow our Lord's teaching about forgiveness to shut him out of our lives. We should not even try to worship God if there is someone with whom we are angry: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt. 5:23-24).

Note that this passage is not even talking about our anger with some other person but rather their anger with us. If we know that someone has something against us, we should make every effort possible to be reconciled to that person before we can worship God. It is true that in some cases the other person may refuse to be reconciled, and of course, we may not be able to do anything about that. However, the tragedy in most of our lives is that we have not even made the attempt. Our pride leads us to think that the other person should make the first move. Then we will consider doing whatever is necessary to be reconciled to that person. However, Jesus leaves the responsibility with us. If there is a problem, we are expected to make the first move. We forgive them, even though they may not be willing to forgive us.

Many of us will forgive a person once or twice, perhaps even three times, but is there a limit beyond which we should not be expected to go? That was exactly what Peter thought: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Mt. 18:21-22).

In other words we shoud be willing to forgive an unlimited number of times. I do not think our Lord is specifying that we should forgive 490 times, and then we have a right to stop. He is using a large figure in this case — a number of times that no one would ever have to forgive some other person. This is simply our Lord's use of hyperbole. For the Christian there should be no boundaries to forgiving.

Even more drastic than his teaching about forgiveness is his teaching about our enemies. Forgiveness has to do with our friends to a large extent, but our enemies are another matter entirely. It must have been absolutely staggering when

Jesus told the people they should love their enemies: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Mt. 5:44).

Many of us live our Christian lives thinking we should be nice to the nice people and nasty to the nasty people. If we follow the teaching of Jesus then we will go through life thinking we should be nice to the nice people and even nicer to the nasty people. In many cases such a concept leaves no room whatsoever for Jesus.

Finally, some of us have no room for Jesus because he made it quite clear that his people could expect persecution from the world: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).

John gives us a more extreme example of this same principle earlier in the sixteenth chapter: "Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (Jn. 16:2).

Brother Andrew, "God's Smuggler," has preached in The Peoples Church on many occasions. Everywhere he goes he gives people a small lapel pin, but there is nothing to it except a bit of rather sharp barbed wire. When I asked Brother Andrew what this was for, he told me it reminded Christian people that many of the Christians of the world are behind barbed wire and are suffering persecution. This is certainly sad, but we should remember that Jesus predicted this would happen.

The question the rest of us should ask is this: "Why have we not suffered any very severe persecution?" I do not know the answer, but at least, for the time being, some of us do not suffer persecution. I wonder how many of us would have room in our lives for Jesus if it meant living behind barbed wire and suffering persecution from our government.

Jesus might have made his appearance in this world with all the glory of heaven around him. He could have come with ten thousand angels. He could have been born in a palace with a great many attendants. He might have been in line to inherit an earthly throne. However, he was born a helpless baby, probably in a stable, with no human help for his

mother in the agony of producing her first child, and almost in complete obscurity.

There was no room for Jesus in the inn at Bethlehem. There were simply too many other people who had arrived before Mary and Joseph made their appearance. That was indeed a sad situation, but how much more tragic it is that in many of our lives we have no room for Jesus. Not because we are outstanding sinners or savage people, but simply because other people and other things have taken up all the space, and even if Jesus has been invited into our lives, we have given him only a stable in a small corner.

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Luke 3:21-22

Chapter 3

The Inauguration

The baptism of Jesus was the inauguration of his public ministry. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story. Matthew's account is the longest. In the English Bible there are five verses and 111 words (Mt. 3:13-17). Mark tells the story in three verses and 63 words (Mk. 1:9-11). Luke's is the shortest account with two verses and 55 words (Lk. 3:21-22). John does not tell the story in detail at all. However, it is implied in his first chapter (Jn. 1:29-34). John uses six verses and 140 words to tell some of the details that we know from the other gospels happened at the time of our Lord's baptism, but he does not actually say that Jesus was baptized.

There are very few stories about Jesus that are told by all four of the gospel writers. The feeding of the five thousand, the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper and the exposure of Judas as the betrayer of the Saviour, the prayer of

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the actual betrayal of Jesus by Judas, the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas who was the High Priest at that time, his trial before the Sanhedrin, his trial before Pilate and an account of the Apostle Peter's denial of his Lord are common to all four.

Even the important events surrounding the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus are not told by each of the gospel writers. Each recounts differently how Jesus was led away from his judgment before Pilate and hence to the cross. The story of the crucifixion is common to all four gospels. They all relate the accounts of the burial, the women who went to the sepulchre to anoint the body, and the resurrection, although even the account of the resurrection is not told in exactly the same manner by each of the gospel writers.

It is important that we recognize the great differences between the gospel accounts. It is quite obvious, even to a casual reader, that these men did not simply copy their stories from some common source. Rather, they told the stories, perhaps with some references to a common source, but decidedly with an emphasis on those events that were of particular interest to them, and perhaps events only that writer had seen or remembered.

However, we cannot leave the matter at this point. Even though each gospel writer may have told about those events which he had seen himself or perhaps remembered, we must recognize that in each case the Holy Spirit of God "breathed" into the hearts and minds of the writers the exact material he was to use. That is where we get our concept of the "inspiration of the Bible." The literal meaning of *inspiration* is *God-breathed*. The gospels were not devised by these men whose names they bear, but rather, they were given to these men by a direct act of the Holy Spirit of God. In each gospel we can see the peculiar human characteristics of the human author, but we need to remember that the things he wrote were directed by God: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Tim. 3:16).

Luke is the only writer who mentions that Jesus prayed while he was being baptized. As a matter of fact, there seems to be more emphasis on prayer in the Gospel of Luke than there is in any of the other gospels.

During the early part of his ministry, when Jesus was being

followed by a multitude of people and there was great pressure on him, he withdrew from the people and prayed: "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Lk. 5:15-16).

When it was necessary to decide who he would choose to be his disciples, once again he took time to pray: "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Lk. 6:12-13).

Just before he asked the disciples the question that resulted in what we call "Peter's confession of faith," once again Luke points out that Jesus took time to pray: "And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?"(Lk. 9:18). Matthew and Mark tell exactly the same story about Peter's confession but neither of them mention the fact that Jesus was praying at the time. It was only after the prayer that he asked the question.

The story of our Lord's transfiguration is told by three of the gospel writers and once again we notice both Matthew and Mark say nothing about prayer. It remained for Luke to mention that Jesus had gone up into the mountain with Peter and John and James to pray: "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias" (Lk. 9:28-30).

It is Luke who points out that Jesus was praying just before he taught his disciples how to pray what we call "the Lord's Prayer." Matthew tells the same story, but he omits that Jesus was praying: "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Lk. 11:1).

It is only Luke who mentions that Jesus was praying for Peter when he told him that he would deny him three times: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have

prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:31-32). Matthew and Mark tell this story, but say nothing about the prayer.

Both Matthew and Mark describe Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Luke also tells this story: "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed" (Lk. 22:41).

In his description of the crucifixion the apostle John says nothing about Jesus praying, but both Matthew and Mark mention it, and Luke includes it as well: "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Lk. 24:30).

Only Mark and Luke mention the appearance of our Lord to the two people on their way to Emmaus. Mark mentions this incident, but very briefly. Luke, however, uses more detail and points out that Jesus blessed the food before they ate: "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them" (Lk. 24:30).

Of course all the disciples talk about the prayer life of their Master, but Luke calls our attention to this aspect of Jesus more than any of the other gospel writers and, as already mentioned, points out that Jesus prayed at the time of his baptism. It would seem that when Jesus prayed he did so to get away from the pressures of the world and have fellowship with his Father in heaven. This stands in contrast to most of our praying. Usually we pray with a list before us or in our minds — a list of things we want from God. Certainly it is true that God has promised to answer our prayers when we ask him for things: "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24).

And so time after time we come before God with our list of things that we want God to do for us. How sad that most of us have never learned that prayer gives us an unparalleled opportunity to have fellowship with God. It would seem we are always moving so fast and need so many things that we seldom stop just to be aware of the presence of God in our lives. We should go to God — not always for things, but sometimes for fellowship and the strength that comes from that kind of prayer life:

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth (Ps. 46:10)
But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him (Hab. 2:20).

Be silent, O all flesh before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation (Zech. 2:13).

The Psalmist and Habakkuk obviously knew the importance of being silent or still before God. They had learned that this kind of fellowship is sometimes more valuable in prayer than a great deal of speaking. However, this is a hard lesson to learn, and many of us go through an entire lifetime without realizing the importance of waiting upon God. Certainly we may assume Jesus spent a great deal of time in silent prayer. Often when there was a great deal of pressure from people demanding his teaching and his healing, Jesus withdrew from the crowd and spent many hours alone with God — an entire night on occasion: “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Lk. 6:12). I think it is safe to assume our Lord did not talk all the time during those all-night prayer sessions. A great deal of time was probably spent in silent fellowship with the Father.

Unfortunately most of us spend our prayer time in talking to God and asking for things. We seldom give God time to talk to us. Whether we are talking or silent it would seem one of the chief purposes of prayer is fellowship with God. There are times when we cannot stand the world any longer and we desperately need to have fellowship with the Father.

I think the apostle Paul may have been talking about this kind of silent prayer when he wrote to the church at Rome: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry. Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15).

The word *abba* is an Aramaic word for *father*. It was used to express an extremely close relationship between children and their father. Before the days of Jesus the word was almost never used in relationship to God. It was the coming of Christ that introduced man to God on an intimate basis, and in all probability, whenever Jesus addressed the Father he used the Greek word *pater* which means *father*, but he preceded it with the Aramaic *abba*. This denoted a child-like intimacy and

trust, and no disrespect whatever. This was the kind of prayer Jesus demonstrated to the disciples and practiced himself. These men learned the power of prayer that brought them into a very close fellowship with God. This was something the world had never known before. However, if we take Jesus as our example, we should see this kind of prayer involves long hours and a great deal of silence on our part.

If indeed his baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry, there would have been no other time he would have felt the need more strongly to confirm his close relationship with the Father. As he came up from the water, undoubtedly he saw the work that lay ahead of him — his teaching, his healing, the agony of the cross, his burial, his triumphant resurrection and his assent back to the Father. This was certainly a time when Jesus needed to affirm that he and the Father were one. It is a wonder to me the other gospel writers said nothing about his prayer at this crucial time in his "life". However, the apostle Luke does include it: "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, *and praying*, the heaven was opened" (Lk. 3:21).

The baptism of Jesus was a public demonstration of his identity with man. Certainly there was no need for Jesus to be baptized as far as he was concerned personally. He had never sinned. The Bible is quite clear about this: "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death: because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:9).

The author of the book of Hebrews leaves us with the impression that it would have been quite possible for Jesus to have sinned. In other words, he identified himself with man to such an extent that he had exactly the same potential to sin as any other man or woman would have had: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Of course there would be no logic in the temptation of Jesus if sin had not been a possibility for him.

Later on in the same book the author reemphasizes that Jesus was absolutely sinless: "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). Once again we should notice Jesus was sinless, not because he could not

sin, but rather because he *did* not sin.

The apostle Peter tells us Jesus is a good example of the fact that it is possible for a Christian to live without sinning: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1Pet. 2:22-24).

The apostle John, who probably knew Jesus more intimately than anybody else, emphasizes exactly the same thing: "Whoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin" (1Jn. 3:4-5).

Certainly there was no reason for Jesus to be baptized as far as he was concerned himself. He was absolutely sinless and baptism was for people who sinned and wanted to repent of their sins. The only possible reason for the baptism of Jesus was that it was an unparalleled opportunity to identify himself with us. Under the preaching of John the Baptist there was a great movement of the people toward God. Jesus became one of the people, but by doing so he was doing something he did not have to do. This is one of the basic principles in the teaching of Jesus Christ. He calls us to live the kind of life that from the human standpoint is not necessary. Holiness often leads people to do what is not absolutely necessary — to go the second mile, to feed an enemy that is hungry or to take our place at the end of the line instead of at the front.

The heart of the gospel message is that Jesus Christ took our sins upon himself, so that when we trust him as our Saviour we become absolutely sinless. It is just as though we had never sinned: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . for the transgression of my people was he stricken . . . for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:6,8,11).

Many times the apostle Paul emphasized exactly the same thing: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2Cor. 5:21).

By being baptized Jesus was saying in vivid terms that he was one of us. He did not put himself in the position of a highly exalted God who looked down upon us. Rather he lived among us, was subject to all of the effects of sin that are in the world, and "signified" that he was with us rather than above us. He demonstrated that he knew personally all of the temptations faced by men and women in this sin cursed world.

In this context it would be good for us to realize that a preacher is much more effective if he does not preach *down* to his people. There are many preachers in all denominations who keep themselves totally aloof from their people. There was a dentist in my congregation years ago who drew me to one side and told me something that has made a dramatic difference in my ministry. He said "Paul, you should learn to preach among your people rather than down to your people." From that day to this I have tried to use the word "you" as seldom as possible. I go out of my way to use the pronoun "we." I remember that I am one of the people. I am not elevated above them in any sense, but rather subject to all of the same problems they have. This is a principle some preachers never learn. They live their entire lives as if they were always in the pulpit, elevated above their people, looking down on their people as if they themselves were not human beings at all. In my opinion, the only effective kind of preaching is the sort that gives people the impression their pastor is one of them. He understands where they are living, because he is living there too.

If anybody was in a position to preach *down* to the people it was Jesus. However, he went out of his way to be one of the people to whom he preached, and that is part of what he was doing when he submitted to baptism. He was saying "I am one of you." This was not to say that he ceased being God, but he allowed himself to move among the people so that he understood their problems, their sins, their temptations and their needs.

As we have already said, the baptism of Jesus was the inauguration for his ministry. It was his public assumption of his work. During this inauguration three things happened: "The heaven was open" (Lk. 3:21). When we use the word heaven we usually are referring to one of three different areas. There is the heaven where the birds fly. That is the area immediately above the earth, but not actually a part of the

earth. In the second place there is the heaven where the stars are located. This is above the earth and above the area where the birds fly. This is the heaven of space — the area where the stars, the sun, and millions of galaxies are located. Finally, we use the word heaven to refer to the dwelling place of God. When Luke says that the heaven was opened, I think he may have been referring to all three heavens. In other words, the entire universe, including the dwelling place of God, was looking down upon the Son of God as he was being baptized. It is as if everything stopped to focus attention on one of the most important events that had ever transpired. God was about to set in motion his plan for the salvation of man.

The second thing that happened when Jesus was baptized was that the “Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him” (Lk. 3:22).

This is the only place in the Bible where this symbolism occurs, but in the Jewish Talmud we find exactly the same symbolism in its comments about the first chapter of Genesis and the second verse: “The Spirit of God moved on the waters like a dove.”

The great English poet of the 17th century, John Milton, must have been familiar with the Talmud because in his classical work *Paradise Lost* he refers to the same symbolism of the Holy Spirit as a dove:

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings out spread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant (Book 1, lines 17-22).

In the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied that the Holy Spirit would descend upon Jesus to empower him for the mission he was to accomplish: “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:2).

Towards the end of the book of Isaiah we find the words Jesus quoted in the fourth chapter of Luke — words that have to do with exactly the same thing: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to

preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn” (Isa. 61:1-2).

Finally, at the baptism of Jesus the Father spoke: “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22). The Father was expressing the fact that he was pleased with Jesus up until this point—that is approximately the first thirty years of his human life. I think he was also expressing in advance his pleasure with what Jesus would be doing the next three and a half years. It is interesting that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in the baptism of Jesus Christ. The Son was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son, and the Father spoke.

Saint Jerome, the Roman Catholic priest who lived during the latter half of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, is traditionally regarded as the most learned of the Latin Fathers. Among other things he established a monastery at Bethlehem. However, he is remembered by most people as the man to whom we are indebted for the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible. Jerome said: “The mystery of the Trinity is shown in the baptism of Christ. The Lord is baptized, the Spirit descends in the likeness of a dove, the voice of the Father is heard bearing witness to his Son, and the dove settles on the head of Jesus, lest anyone should imagine that the voice was for John and not for Christ.”

The Son came, the Holy Spirit empowered, and the Father spoke. The Son loves us enough to suffer death and hell for us; the Spirit agrees by strengthening him; and the Father gives his approval by speaking.

Eight hundred years before the baptism of Jesus Christ the prophet Isaiah cried out to God: “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence” (Isa. 64:1).

We have to go back to the last three verses of chapter sixty-three of the book of Isaiah to see just why the prophet made this prayer: “O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants’ sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our

adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name" (Isa. 63:17- 19).

There are times when all of us pray the prayer of Isaiah and cry out for God to rend the heavens. People all around us are in a degenerate state and conditions seem to get worse and worse. The moral problems are beyond our comprehension. Some of us have insurmountable financial difficulties and almost every family has its own personal anxieties. Sometimes when there seems to be absolutely no answer, no way out and no solutions to the problems of life all of us wish God would rend the heavens and do something about it.

I can visualize the scene in heaven in the year 30 A.D. All the angels and all the people had their eyes fixed on what was happening in the Jordan River. Perhaps someone said "Go find Isaiah and tell him his prayer is being answered. It is actually happening. God has opened heaven for his Son to go down to earth, and now there is an open door for sinful man to go into the presence of a Holy God."

What a benediction it should be to us as we face the future, with all of its problems, anxieties, and suffering, to know that heaven is open. We do not have to pray the prayer of Isaiah. That has already been answered for all of us. We need to face the future with confidence and bathe it in prayer, knowing that our prayers will get through to God. Heaven has indeed been rent.

Part Two

The Messiah's Message — Chapter 4

The Messiah's Call — Chapter 5

The Messiah's Logic — Chapter 6

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Luke 4:16-21

Chapter 4

The Messiah's Message

Suppose we were to attend a church service in which the following three hymns were sung:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
The King of creation!¹

Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne.²

I am not skilled to understand
What God hath willed, what God hath planned;
I only know at his right hand,
Is one who is my Saviour!³

At the end of the singing of these three hymns suppose

some stranger were to come in, walk directly up to the platform, and begin to speak: "I want to tell you who I am. You have been singing about me. I am the Lord, I am the Almighty, I am the King of creation, I am the Lamb, and I am your Saviour."

I am reasonably sure that if such a strange thing should happen in one of our church services we would make haste to get that stranger off the platform and out of the church. We would think it was preposterous to make these kinds of claims.

However, this is exactly what Jesus did, and Luke records it in this chapter. This scene took place in Nazareth, our Lord's home town. He had been born in Bethlehem and during his ministry he made his headquarters in Capernaum. However, he had been brought up in Nazareth. When he got there he went immediately into the synagogue and attended one of their regular services. The leader of that service would quote the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." There would be a prayer both before and after the quoting of the Shema. In all probability the leader would pray and the congregation would say "Amen" after each of the prayers. Then there would be a reading of a passage from the *Pentateuch*. The passage would be read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic. Then would come a reading of another passage from the *Prophets*. It would be read in Hebrew and translated into Aramaic. Then would come the sermon, which would be delivered by another of the leaders of the synagogue, or by some visiting teacher. Both Jesus, and later the apostle Paul, took advantage of this procedure in order to preach the gospel to the Jews. Finally, the benediction would be pronounced by a priest, or if there was no priest, the leader would simply close the service with prayer, and the congregation would respond by saying "Amen".

On this occasion, apparently the leader chose Jesus to read the passage from the *Prophets*. Jesus read the passage that is our text and which Luke quotes in his fourth chapter: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are

bruised" (Lk. 4:18).

Up to this point Jesus had done what was natural and customary in a synagogue service, but then he moved quickly from the natural and customary to the amazing and unexpected. After giving the book of Isaiah back to the leader of the meeting, he said: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your eyes."

In other words, he was declaring that this verse applied to him. He was the one who was going to preach the gospel to the poor. He was the one who was going to heal the broken-hearted. He was the one who was going to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. He was the one who was going to set at liberty those that were bruised. He was the one who was going to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, or that God was ready to give blessings to all who came to him.

His audience was absolutely astounded. They probably turned to one another and said, "Who does he think he is? How can this man with whom we were reared make such fantastic claims? This is the carpenter's son. We all know him. We played together as children. How dare he make such impossible claims!" It is no wonder they threw him out of their synagogue and out of their town. They were about to throw him over a cliff when he disappeared.

Once again, it is only Luke that tells this story. It does not appear in any of the other gospels.

The Gospel For The Poor

In our affluent society in North America we are reluctant to admit that most of the Christians in the world are poor people. We are the exception, not the rule. There is no prosperity gospel in the New Testament. There is no promise that if we live for God we will prosper financially and materially. Undoubtedly, Jesus mentions the spiritually poor in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). The Greek word for poor is *ptochos*. The same word is used by Matthew in the verse we have just quoted and also in our passage in the *Gospel of Luke*. I think it does no violence to the word of God to conclude that Jesus was concerned about two kinds of poverty in both of these passages — that is, material and spiritual.

This same concept is found many times in the Bible: “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Prov. 29:23).

“But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:2).

The Gospel For The Broken-hearted

In this life there are a great many things that cause sadness. As a matter of fact, it seems there is a great deal more sadness than gladness. Our lives are lived more in the valley than on the mountaintop. There is a great deal more tension than relaxation. There are a great many heartbroken people in this world, and all of us face heartbreak on occasion.

In the midst of our heartbreak, sometimes we seek counsel from friends or from a professional — a psychiatrist, a physician, or a pastor. Sad to say, many of us approach these people expecting the kind of help they are unable to give. We start off by saying, “I am broken-hearted. Fix my world. I am having difficulty with my wife or husband. Go and talk to them.”

However, it is usually impossible for any counsellor to straighten out our world so that we can live in it and not be hurt. The most he or she can do is show us how we can learn to live in this world as it is. The gospel of Jesus Christ gives us that kind of power. It does not remove the problems and the heartache common to man, but it does give us an inner strength so we are able to live in a world that is much less than satisfactory.

But once again, in addition to this sadness that is a part of the world in which we live, the Bible often speaks about having a broken heart before God: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18). This, of course, is talking about being broken-hearted because of our own sins and shortcomings.

The Gospel That Delivers Captives

Nobody knew more about the burden of captivity than did the Jews, and our Lord ministered among his own Jewish people more than anybody else while he was in this world.

The prophet Isaiah wrote the words which Jesus quotes in about the year 760 B.C. Just fifteen years later the king of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser III, descended on the nation of Israel and took a great many of the people to his own land as slaves. This was in about the year 745 B.C., and the Jewish people were dominated by stronger powers from that time until the days of Jesus, when they were ruled by the Roman Empire.

The Jewish people of our Lord's day thought a great deal about deliverance from the captivity of Rome. Even the disciples expected Jesus would establish the Kingdom of God during their lifetime. It was when the Master was on trial before Pilate that he stated unequivocally: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (Jn. 18:36).

As far as the people were concerned to whom he ministered, deliverance from captivity had to do with the bondage of sin and the power of Satan. This is what the apostle Paul was talking about when he said: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:24-25).

Our hymnology is filled with the glorious fact of deliverance. No one wrote more effectively about this than the Congregational minister, William True Sleeper, who lived in New England during the 19th century:

Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,
Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into thy freedom, gladness and light,
Jesus, I come to thee.
Out of my sickness into thy health,
Out of my want and into thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into thyself,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of my shameful failure and loss,
Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into the glorious gain of thy cross,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of earth's sorrows into thy balm,
Out of life's storms and into thy calm,
Out of distress to jubilant psalm,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of unrest and arrogant pride,
Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into thy blessed will to abide,
Jesus I come to thee.
Out of myself to dwell in thy love,
Out of despair into raptures above,
Upward for aye on wings like a dove,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of the fear and dread of the tomb,
Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into the joy and light of thy home,
Jesus I come to thee.
Out of the depths of ruin untold,
Into the peace of thy sheltering fold,
Ever thy glorious face to behold,
Jesus, I come to thee.

It was to a group of people very conscious of the burden they bore as a result of their captivity to the Roman Empire, that Jesus said: "If the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

The Gospel For The Blind

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask him: "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" Jesus replied by saying, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Lk. 7:20,22).

Sometimes the gospel writers talk about our Lord's miracles of healing without mentioning any person in particular. In other places we find the stories of individuals separated from the crowd, and sometimes even named. Apparently Jesus dealt with some blind people in groups: "the blind see." On other occasions he healed individuals who

were blind. One of these was named Bartimaeus. His story is told by Matthew, Mark and Luke, but only Mark gives his name.

John is the only gospel writer who tells the story of the man whom we usually describe as the "man born blind." In my opinion one of the most exciting passages in the Bible is this blind man's response to the religious leaders when they questioned him: "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (Jn. 9:25).

From the apostle John's standpoint, the entire purpose of this story is to point out the fact that Jesus claimed to be a spiritual light for spiritual darkness: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5). This chapter ends with these words: "And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (Jn. 9:40-41).

It would indeed be sad if we were to concentrate so much on our Lord's miraculous physical healings that we did not learn the lesson they were meant to teach us. Physical blindness is a dreadful malady. However, spiritual blindness is an eternal malady.

The Gospel For Those Who Are Oppressed

The King James Version reads, "To set at liberty them that are bruised." The word *bruised* is a translation of a participle form of the Greek word, *thrano*. Other translations of the same word could be: to break in pieces, to shatter, to crush, or to oppress. Perhaps the best translation of this word would be *battered*.

When we use this word we are generally talking about somebody who has been punched about, bounced around, or buffeted unmercifully by some other, so-called, human being. However, I think we should add to this list those unfortunate people who have been *battered* by the circumstances of life itself. For a great many people life has been a rocky road indeed. We need to be very careful that we do not lead people to believe the gospel always smooths out our road and our relationships with other people here and now. Unfortunately, until the second coming of Jesus Christ we will still be in this

veil of tears, during which the Saviour promises: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

The Gospel Of The Messiah

“The acceptable year of the Lord” could be translated by the words *In the year of the Lord’s favour*. In some of the modern versions that is the translation used. This is a reference to what the Jewish people called their Sabbatical Year, or rather, the culmination of seven Sabbatical years, being seven times seven years, or, 49. Not only did God command his people to keep a Sabbath during which they themselves would rest, but he also commanded that they should permit their land to rest every seven years: “When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyards, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord; thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.”

Farther on in this same passage, God’s people are instructed that at the end of seven Sabbatical years, they should usher the fiftieth year in with a great deal of celebration and jubilation: “And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; It shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubile shalt that fiftieth year be unto you” (Lev. 25:2-4,8-10,11). Of course, the ultimate of jubile years would be when the Jewish Messiah returned and established his kingdom. In the context of this passage in the fourth chapter of Luke it is this symbol of the Messianic Age about which Jesus was talking.

There is a sense in which the Year of Jubilee started that very day when Jesus proclaimed it in the synagogue at Nazareth, but it will not be completed until the Messiah comes.

1. “Praise To the Lord the Almighty”, by Joachim Neander
2. “Crown Him with Many Crowns”, by Matthew Bridges
3. “I Am not Skilled to Understand”, by Dorothy Greenwell

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

Luke 5:1-7

Chapter 5

The Messiah's Call

Modern fishermen net about one thousand tons of fish from the sea of Galilee annually. Two thousand years ago Peter, James, John and probably Andrew were in the fishing business on this body of water around which so much of our Lord's ministry took place.

Luke refers to it in this passage as the Lake of Gennesaret. In the Old Testament it is called the sea of Chinnereth (Numbers 34:11) or Chinneroth (Joshua 12:3), and in the Gospel of John he uses the name the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1). In modern Israel it is called Yam Kinneret. Most of us know it best as the sea of Galilee, which is one of the names used by every gospel writer with the exception of Luke.

The sea of Galilee was thirteen miles long from north to south and seven miles wide from east to west. It was almost seven hundred feet below sea level. During the days of Jesus

the shoreline of the sea of Galilee was the most heavily populated rural area in all of Palestine. There were nine major towns located on its forty miles of shoreline and not any of them had a population of less than fifteen thousand people. On the map of Israel today all of those towns are missing except Tiberias. The Rabbis used to say that the sea of Galilee was "one among the seven seas of Canaan which God had reserved for himself."

The sea of Galilee was well-known throughout the Roman world for its fish. It is quite possible that Peter, James, John and Andrew were not only fishermen but also in the export business. It is true they were not well-educated as far as schooling was concerned, but in all probability they were extremely clever businessmen. As far as the Jewish population was concerned there were only two kinds of fish in the sea of Galilee, clean and unclean — that is, those their dietary laws permitted them to eat and those they were not permitted to eat. The fish that were ceremonially clean would include the tilapia. This fish was about twelve inches in length and deep-bodied. Its commercial value lay in the fact that it grew rapidly and was easy to breed. In all probability the two fish found in the boy's lunch when Jesus fed the five thousand people were of this variety — as was the fish which Peter caught and from its mouth took the coin with which he and Jesus paid the tribute. Another of the clean fish would be the bleak or freshwater sardine. This was a slender, bony fish about eight inches in length which belonged to the carp family. In eastern Europe the scales of these fish were used in the manufacturing of artificial pearls.

Among the unclean fish found in the sea of Galilee were catfish, eel and lamprey. In the story Jesus told where the men separated the good fish from the bad fish, very likely they kept the ceremonially clean and threw away those that were forbidden (Mt. 13:47-48). Once again this is a story found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. On this occasion, when Jesus came to the shoreline he saw two empty fishing boats. The owners were at a little distance from their boats, busy washing their nets. They had been fishing all night and were getting ready for the next night's activities. The boats were owned by Peter and James and John who were partners in the fishing business. Incidentally, this is the first time we find these three mentioned together. As we have seen in the

other gospels there were going to be a number of special occasions in which this “inside” circle of disciples would be with Jesus in places where the other nine did not go. Peter and James and John went with Jesus into the home of Jairus (Lk. 8). They were the three disciples that Jesus took up into the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9), and they were also closer to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26).

These were relatively large boats. At least one of them had the capacity to accommodate Jesus and the twelve disciples at one time. Just after they had received the news about the death of John the Baptist they all got into one boat to cross the lake to where Jesus fed the five thousand people. And on that same day, after Jesus had prayed in the mountain for some hours and the disciples had fought the storm for the same length of time, Jesus rejoined them in the same boat from which he calmed the storm.

Jesus got into Peter’s boat and then asked him to push it away from the shore a little bit so he could talk to the crowd without them being able to press closely around him. Jesus sat down and taught the people from Peter’s boat. It is interesting to note how often Jesus sat down before he taught. This was common among Asiatic teachers and of course this practice has spread among the universities of the world. That is one of the reasons we refer to the various positions of the college or university as chairs. There is the chair of Philosophy, the chair of Psychology, the chair of English and so on. Peter was probably sitting in the boat watching and listening to Jesus.

When the Master had finished his teaching he asked Peter to “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught” (Lk. 5:4). Whereupon Peter protested and said, “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing” (Lk. 5:5). This was a way of saying, “You’re a carpenter. I’m the fisherman. I happen to know that the best time to catch fish is at night, not when the sun is high. And the best place to catch fish is not out in the deep water at this time of year. Every good fisherman knows that at this time of the year the fish are on the shoals, close to shore.”

“Nevertheless,” sighed Peter, “at thy word I will let down the net” (Lk. 5:5). Whereupon they caught what Luke describes as a “great multitude of fishes.” It was such a huge catch they had to beckon their partners in the other boat to come over and help them. There were so many fish that both

of the boats almost went under with the weight.

Perhaps the miracle was not so much that they caught an enormous number of fish, but rather that Jesus seemed to know exactly where this particular school of fish was. It may even be that he directed the fish to come to this particular place. This miracle astonished Peter. Very likely the other men were equally astonished, but Peter was generally the one who demonstrated how he felt whether or not the others did so. Immediately Peter fell down before Jesus and cried out "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8).

Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Lk. 5:10). Apparently the words of Jesus were directed to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, as well, because they all left their profitable fishing business and followed Jesus.

There are many great truths and principles that can be derived from this story, but there are two that strike me immediately. The first is that human beings who are still in their sins are terrified in the presence of God. The second is that Jesus Christ generally calls us to do what we are best equipped to do and like to do.

Humans in the Presence of God

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8). This was generally the reaction of the disciples whenever Jesus did something supernatural. It seems they could cope with him as long as his activities involved the kinds of things they themselves could do. When Jesus acted as a man there was no fear, but when he did something only God could do they were extremely frightened (see Paul B. Smith, *Jesus by Mark*, Burlington, Welch, 1987, pp.154-55).

However, we should notice this has always been the reaction of a sinful man when confronted by the presence of God.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8).

The people of Israel: "And they said unto Moses, Speak

thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:19).

Ezra: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra 9:6).

Job: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

Samson's mother and father: "For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the Lord did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the Lord. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Judg. 13:20-22).

Isaiah: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

Daniel: "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I not sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling" (Dan. 10:8-11). It should be noted that in this particular vision Daniel did not see some angelic messenger from God. There is every reason to believe this was an appearance of God himself to the prophet.

John: "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many

waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. 1:13-17). Daniel's vision and John's vision are very much like one another in many aspects, which is one of the reasons most commentators believe Daniel actually saw God. In the case of the apostle John the Bible declares he actually had a vision of God.

The first step in any relationship with God is an awareness of our sin in the light of God's holiness. This is powerfully illustrated in the case of David after he had sinned with Bathsheba: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:1-5).

But I can almost hear people responding at this point saying they had been reared in a Christian home, had gone to church all their lives, and had never really been sinful. It is important to remember that many of the people whose experiences we have related were very far from being *evil* in the sense of our general use of the word. Adam and Eve had not lived long enough to have committed any great sins. Job was chosen by God because he was the most righteous man in the world at that time. David was called a man after God's own heart. The apostle John was often referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved in a special way. The fact is that when we relate any aspect of our lives to God we come out very poorly indeed. Our best is bad, our whiteness is blackness and our righteousness is unholy as far as God is concerned.

When we have seen ourselves in the light of the holiness of God and we confess our deplorable condition before God, then we can expect to hear the words Simon Peter heard — "Fear not." As soon as David made his confession he followed it by a prayer for forgiveness, and obviously he expected that prayer to be answered: "Create in me a clean

heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps. 51:10-11).

Almost immediately after Job's repentance we find these words: "The Lord also accepted Job. And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:9-10).

The prophet Isaiah had a very similar experience after his confession: "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isa. 6:6-7).

After the apostle John's vision of God we see these words immediately following: "And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death" (Rev. 1:17-18).

Even after we have experienced God's forgiveness and we know that the power of the blood of Jesus Christ has washed away our sins we need to remember that God is still God, and we should be careful to maintain our extreme reverence for him. It always makes me cringe when I hear some of the ways we approach God. It is as if God has become a sort of divine "buddy" we can slap on the back as we might one of our lodge brothers. I have great difficulty with the popular song that describes God as "the man upstairs."

This overfamiliarity with God can be seen in both our respect, and lack of it, for God's house — the actual material building. Many of us have completely lost our reverence for the house of God. As a result, we act and talk and move about in the church as if it was just any other building. We seem to think it is quite all right to talk to a friend while the one who is leading the service is praying. Sometimes we move about unnecessarily in the middle of a service of divine worship. Many of us will get up and leave during the last part of the sermon or during the benediction so we can get out five minutes ahead of the crowd.

The other extreme of this same concept can be seen in church buildings so grand we feel embarrassed about moving in any way. It can be seen in services conducted by people

who speak in unnatural voices. We need to ask God to show us the happy medium between these two extremes — over familiarity with God and no familiarity with God whatsoever.

God Calls Us To Do What We Are Best Equipped To Do

“And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Can you imagine what a thrill it was for these people who had chosen to live their lives as fishermen to discover that they could use their fishing techniques in the service of God? Jesus was telling these fishermen that instead of throwing their nets into the sea of Galilee to catch tilapia and bleak, for the rest of their lives they would throw their nets into the world and catch men and women. These men were fishermen. Fishing was what they knew how to do. It was what they were experienced in doing, and it was what they did better than anything else. Jesus was telling them he did not want them to stop fishing; He was calling them to fish in different waters for a different sort of catch.

I do not believe God expects all of us to be fishers of men. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said: “I never heard Christ say to me, ‘come ye after me, and I will make you a fisher of men’ Why not? Because I am not a fisherman. I never was a fisherman . . . In the year 1886 I sat at my desk teaching, with boys around me, and I loved my work, and I would love it still. I was trained to teach. But there came the hour when my Master passed by, and he said, ‘Follow me, and I will make you a teacher of men’ ” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The God Who Cares*, Old Tappan, N.J., Fleming H. Revell, 1987, p. 109).

That is exactly the philosophy of this story as it is told by Luke. All Christians are not called to be *soul winners*. Let me quickly define my terms. If by *soul winner* we mean that we should have the ability to sit beside a total stranger on an aircraft, engage him in conversation, lead that conversation toward spiritual matters, get our Bible out, explain the gospel to him, and lead him into a prayer of commitment to Christ, then I am not a *soul winner*.

If by *soul winner* we mean the ability to hail a taxi, perhaps to take us to our church, engage the cab driver in a conversation that eventually leads to spiritual things, and

lead him to Christ before we pay our fare, then I am not a *soul winner*.

Unfortunately a great deal of our preaching leads people to believe that everybody should be able to do these kinds of things. The fact is that when I get on an airplane I hope the seat beside me will remain vacant. If it is occupied, I hope the person will not try to talk to me about anything — football, baseball, the news or anything else. I just do not happen to be the kind of person who is comfortable talking one-on-one with a total stranger. So if that is our definition of *soul winner*, then I would have to admit I am not a *soul winner*.

But if by *soul winner* we mean doing something for God and the church that will finally result in people being brought into the kingdom, then I *am* a *soul winner* and every Christian should also be a *soul winner*.

The Bible sometimes compares the church of Jesus Christ to an army. In an army only a few are in the front lines. By far the majority of the soldiers in an army are not in the front lines, but rather, they do things that make it possible for those in the front lines to stay there and fight. Some work in factories far removed from the front, producing the guns and ammunition without which the people at the front would be helpless. Some drive trucks that transport the equipment. Some cook food that keeps the soldiers at the front alive so they can fight. All of them are soldiers. One is not anymore important than the other. The army needs all kinds of people doing what they are best equipped and trained to do.

In the church of Jesus Christ most of us are not fishermen, any more than all of the members of the armed forces are at the front of the battle shooting the enemy. Some are teachers, some ushers, some musicians, some administrators and some office workers. All of us are not only important but we are very necessary to the work. Many years ago the Walter Bakewell family were very active workers in The Peoples Church. Walter Bakewell was our head usher. He was gifted in handling the large crowds that came to most of the services in the early days. He had a great knack for seating people, and he was expert at guarding against disturbances of one kind or another during the services.

Ann Bakewell, his wife, was a prayer warrior and a counsellor. When people responded to the invitation given at the close of many of the services she always led some of them

to Christ. On the other hand, Ann would have been hopeless as the head usher just as Walter would have been hopeless in the counselling room.

Which of the Bakewells were the soul winners? Ann? No! Without Walter, there would have been nobody to respond to the invitation. Was Walter the soul winner? No! It would have been useless to organize the seating of people if there had not been people like Ann to lead them to Christ once they came forward and entered the counselling room.

Of course the answer is, both! There is an interesting story in the book of I Samuel about one of David's confrontations with the Amalekites. Apparently they had taken a great many of David's people captive including two of David's wives. David set out with six hundred men to overtake the Amalekites and bring their captives back to their homes. Two hundred of David's men were not able to go with him to this particular battle, so he left them behind to take care of the equipment. After David and the four hundred soldiers came back victorious, there was some discussion as to who should benefit from the plunder. Some thought the four hundred who actually went into battle should get all of the plunder and that the two hundred who stayed by the stuff did not deserve any of it. Then David made a proclamation: "Do you think that anyone will listen to you when you talk like this? We share and share alike — those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment. From then on David made this a law for all of Israel, and it is still followed" (1 Sam 30:24-25, Living Bible).

For nearly twenty years we have been televising our morning service in The Peoples Church. The service is carried from coast to coast throughout Canada. There were two people who had started attending The Peoples Church who were in the hair dressing business. Herbert and Johanna were husband and wife and they used to sit within two or three rows from the front, not very far from the pulpit. They watched me preaching for a number of months. Finally they could not stand it any longer. Johanna went to a friend of mine, a lady who had been in our church for many years, and said, "I have watched that man preaching as long as I can stand it. He's not a bad preacher but his hair is a mess!"

The result of that confrontation was that both Johanna and Herb offered to look after the hairdo's and make-up for me

and the rest of my staff, as well as any visitors that ever appeared with us on television. They have been doing this now for nearly twenty years.

I do not think that either Johanna or Herb could preach a sermon. On the other hand, I know absolutely nothing about make-up and hairdos. When souls are won through the television program, who gets the credit? Why of course, the credit goes to Paul Smith. He is the preacher. Wrong! The credit goes to Herbert and Johanna. Without them Paul Smith would not be presentable. Wrong! Of course, the answer is that both the preacher and the make-up people together with a great many others — those who operate the public address system and the cameras, the instrumentalists and the singers are all responsible for the souls that are won as a result of our television program. They who stay with the stuff share and share alike with those who go into direct battle.

May I add at this point that every Christian should be able to give a testimony concerning his hope in Christ: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

There is no Christian exempt from this duty. We should all be able and ready to give our own personal testimony. However, not everyone is intended to be a front line *soul winner*. Generally speaking it has been my observation that good soul winners have some of the characteristics of the good salesman. They are people who find it easy to talk to others — even though they may be strangers. These same people would talk about almost anything. They would be able to open up conversations about baseball, vacations, work, and so on. This is a special gift and God expects them to use it in order to win people to Jesus Christ. Let me conclude this chapter by giving a three-fold invitation:

Is there some kind of work in our church for which people are needed and in which we would be competent? Has God been talking to us about teaching a Sunday school class, singing in the choir, working as an usher?

Are we among those people who are very conscious of our sin in the eyes of God, and we would like to accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and hear his "don't be afraid."

Are we the kind of people who do not seem to know exactly

what God wants us to do, but we are willing to forsake whatever he asks, and we are willing to do whatever he calls us to do — anywhere, anytime at any cost!

And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

Luke 6:39-42

Chapter 6

The Messiah's Logic

“A blind man cannot lead a blind man, can he?”

“No, indeed!”

“Will they both not fall into the ditch?”

“Yes, indeed, they will!”

This could be the conversation our Lord suggests may have taken place between two people about blindness. Their answers were obvious to anyone. A person who cannot see himself is absolutely useless as a guide to a blind person. The inevitable result is they will both fall into a ditch.

It is a fact of life that all of us are following other people. Most of us would like to think we are original in either our actions or our words, but the truth is we are not. Even the most original of thinkers derives ideas, in part at least, from others.

It follows then that we should choose very carefully the

people we follow. Jesus makes this very clear in this parable, but what we are quite likely to miss is the corollary of the parable: All of us are followed by somebody. The proposition is: Don't follow a blind man. The corollary is: Be sure you are not blind, because somebody is following you.

Then Jesus states exactly the same principle, but in a different context: "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Lk. 6:40). This is the teacher/student relationship. The teacher is the leader and the student is the follower. Jesus was teaching in a world in which the average person had very little access to books. Certainly, there were some fine libraries throughout the world, but most had almost no access to them. This was some fifteen hundred years before the printing press would be invented. And what books were available had to be printed by hand. Books of any kind were simply not easy to find. In all probability the only books most of these Jewish people had ever seen were copies of the books of Moses and the Prophets that were carefully guarded in their local synagogues.

It would be safe to assume that the average person to whom Jesus talked had never touched a book of any kind. This meant the student was totally dependant upon his teacher, and could only learn as much as his teacher already knew. Jesus is pointing out that every student who is "perfect," or fully trained, can only hope to be as knowledgeable as his teacher. It may not even be possible for him to attain to the same degree of knowledge or wisdom as his teacher, but at least he should be able to reflect his teacher's image to the world.

1. Check Your Eyesight

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye" (Lk. 6:40-41).

It is difficult to picture this illustration without realizing Jesus must have had a great sense of humour. A *beam* was a large piece of wood that had the strength to support some

weight, perhaps even the weight of a roof. A *mote* on the other hand was just a small chip not large enough or strong enough to support anything. Jesus might even have been thinking of a very small speck of sawdust. On the surface the picture our Lord is painting here is absolutely ludicrous. The person with the *beam* in his eye would quite obviously not be able to see at all, let alone be able to pick a small bit of sawdust out of his friend's eye. With such a small particle in his eye the person with the *mote* would probably be able to see something at least, whereas the person with the *beam* could see nothing.

Although the illustration Jesus is using is so extreme that it is ludicrous, it is very close to the truth about our lives and the lives of most of the people in the world. Edward Wallis Hoch (1849-1925), the Governor of Kansas, is credited in the *Marion Record* with the following lines:

There is so much good in the worst of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it hardly behooves any of us
To talk about the rest of us.

This is exactly the same principle that Jesus pointed out when the woman who was caught in the act of adultery was brought to him. He turned to the religious people who had brought her and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone at her" (Lk. 8:7). If Jesus were to use the vocabulary of the *beam* and *mote* in connection with the woman caught in adultery, we might paraphrase his words as follows: "Let him who has no *beam* of sin in his own life feel free to come forward and remove the *mote* of sin in this woman's life." The English poet, George Herbert (1593-1632), emphasized exactly the same thing, but used a different analogy: "Whose house is of glass, must not throw stones at another."

Our Lord is still thinking in terms of the blind man and the teacher with which he introduces these particular sayings. We need to be certain that we can see clearly ourselves before we can offer to help others. We must make sure that we have used every effort to follow the example of a good teacher, before we can offer to be the teacher of other people. Check your eyesight!

2. Check Your Fruit

“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes” (Lk. 6:43-44).

Jesus continues with another aspect of the same principle. He has talked about the necessity of a blind man following a sighted person and a sighted person being the kind of man whom a blind man could follow. Then he talks about the necessity of a student following a good teacher and learning as much as possible from him because there will be students who will look up to him as a teacher and he must have developed as much as possible in studying with his own teacher. In the third place he talks about the necessity of following somebody who does not have some obstruction in his own eye, and making sure we have no obstruction in our eye because there are going to be people following us.

Now he changes the analogy completely and talks about the production of fruit. Again he starts with an obvious truth; Figs and grapes do not come from thorny trees and bramble bushes. We need to ask ourselves the question “what kind of bush am I?” If the answer is we are a bramble bush or a thorny tree, there is no point in saying, “but I am going to try my best to produce grapes.” A person who is a bramble bush simply cannot produce grapes or any other kind of good fruit. We may look at ourselves and realize we are a thorn tree, but then we may add, “But I am going to try to produce figs.” Figs are simply not produced by a thorn tree. There is no sense in wishing we could; we simply cannot do it.

That is why a change is essential. A fig tree or a grapevine would represent a Christian who is right with God, a person that has been changed. Salvation involves a complete transformation. The saved person is no longer a thorn tree or a bramble bush. Once we have been saved we are in the category of fruit-bearing bushes and trees. That is why the Bible says “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

That is what the new birth is all about. Unless there has been a complete change in our lives we cannot bear good fruit because we are not the kind of people from whom good fruit

comes. The Bible makes it clear that there is good fruit and evil fruit. The sort of fruit we bear depends upon the kind of people we are: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Mt. 7:17-18).

This is the message Jesus was teaching to Nicodemus when he told him it was necessary to be born again. In as many words he was saying Nicodemus had absolutely no hope of living for God, because he was the wrong kind of person to start with. He had never been born from above. Of course, this rules out the possibility of becoming a Christian by education or gradual development or continual improvement. A Christian is a person who has been dramatically changed by the Holy Spirit. His character and personality have been changed. He is a new creature. This is the only kind of person who can bear good fruit.

3. *Check Your Treasure Chest.*

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Lk. 6:45).

Once again our Lord changes the analogy in order to stress exactly the same point. He has talked about blind and sighted people, students and teachers, beams and motes, and trees and fruit. Now he moves to the final point in his sermon — treasure chests that contain good things and treasure chests that contain evil things.

The word translated in this passage as *treasure* is our word which is a transliteration of a Greek word — *thesaurus*. Many students and teachers will have several books that fall into the category of *thesauri*. In my library I have *Webster's New World Thesaurus*, which contains a treasury of more than three hundred thousand synonyms and antonyms. I also have *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, which contains a storehouse of five hundred thousand Scripture references and parallel passages. A third book that I have is *Eberhardt's Bible Thesaurus*, which lists a great many different Bible subjects and gives all of the texts in the Bible that relate to each of those subjects. In other words it is a treasury of subjects and

texts. Instead of saying “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart,” we could say “the good thesaurus of his heart.”

The same word is used to describe the gifts that the wise men brought to Jesus when he was born: “When they had opened their treasures (thesaurus), they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” In other words the wise men brought Jesus a treasure chest, or thesaurus, of gifts.

The apostle Paul uses the same word when he writes to the church at Corinth: “But we have this treasure (thesaurus) in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7). At this point he is talking about the treasure chest of blessings the Christian has within him. Our text in the Gospel of Luke indicates our treasure may be either good or bad. The important point is that whatever we treasure in our hearts will be evident by the fruit we produce.

In this case “fruit” refers to our speech and our actions. We may manage to fake these some of the time, but we cannot do so all of the time. There are times when our speech will give us away. For instance, when we ask directions from someone, the answer given may indicate what kind of person he is. If he is a Christian, he may answer, “The place you are looking for is a block from the Grace Church.” If he is a person who likes his liquor he may answer by saying, “You are looking for the place next door to the single’s bar.” The athlete would probably answer, “It is across the street from the stadium.” The nature lover might answer, “It is not far from the city park.” And a person interested in entertainment might answer, “It is close to the Palace Theatre.” In other words what we are on the inside inevitably comes out occasionally in our speech. This we cannot avoid, because this is what we are and this is what comes out.

Jesus is saying we can discern the kind of person we are talking to by listening to what he says. The good or the bad will come out eventually.

If our speech does not indicate what kind of people we are ultimately, our actions will: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22- 23).

There is an interesting passage in the Epistle to the Philippians in which the apostle Paul elaborates on this

principle: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ: Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1: 9-11). Paul is assuring the young Christians of Philippi that he, as their spiritual father, is praying for them. He tells them he is praying for two things: first, that they may have purity of heart — “That ye may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ.” Second, that they may have purity of conduct — “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.”

In other words, Paul tells these Christians he is anxious for them to have such a purity of heart it will be demonstrated to the world by purity of conduct — that the Spirit of God may clean them up on the inside, in order that their lives may be transformed on the outside, or that they may have that righteousness of heart which will manifest itself in righteousness of conduct.

Obviously the Christian who has this has everything. But here is the problem facing us: How can such purity of heart and purity of conduct be realized in our lives? Where do we get it? How is it achieved?

The apostle Paul gives the answer in the ninth verse: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent.”

There are three vitally important words in this prayer — love, knowledge, and judgment. The word “judgment” is defined as the ability to choose “things that are excellent,” or simply, a sense of spiritual discernment. These three words point the way to a purity of heart that will be demonstrated by purity of conduct.

Paul’s first petition for these people is that their “love may abound.” There are two kinds of Christian love. There is the variety of love to which Jesus refers in the latter part of the greatest commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” That is Christian love for other people. The second kind Jesus indicates in the first part of the same commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” That is Christian love for God. It is obvious from

the context of this passage, that Paul is speaking of the second — of the Christian's love for God. If we grow in love for God then we will know automatically where to go, what to do, what is right, and what is wrong.

For most people it is difficult to see the connection between loving God and choosing what is right or wrong.

The second important word Paul uses in his prayer is "knowledge." One of the first manifestations of real love on any plane is a desire to spend time in fellowship with the person we love. This is true on the human level and also on the divine level — in the physical world and also in the spiritual world. When we love someone we wish to spend time with him. If we spend time in fellowship with a person we will gradually learn to know him. The more time we spend the better we will know him.

But for many it is still difficult to see the connection between love for God and knowledge of God and the conduct of our Christian lives. Suppose we do love God. Suppose we spend time in fellowship with God. Suppose we learn to know God considerably better than we know him now. How does this spiritual relationship with God affect our decisions between right and wrong in the world?

The third important word that the apostle uses is "judgment," or sense of spiritual discernment, that God-given ability to choose the "things that are excellent." If we love God whole-heartedly, we will want to spend time in fellowship with God. If we spend time in fellowship with God, we will know God as we have never known him before. When we know God, we will have a sense of spiritual discernment.

Imagine a little girl four or five years old who has been reared on the other side of the tracks. No one has ever cared very much for her apart from her mother. There is no one else in the world who really loves her.

Suppose she becomes seriously ill with a high fever. As she lies on a little cot in an old shack on the other side of the tracks, her frail body racked with the heat and the pain of the fever, she seems to be conscious of the fact that the big, cold outside world really has no interest in her whatsoever. The people out there do not care whether she lives or dies. However, as she lies there, she feels a soothing hand rubbed across her fevered brow. She opens her bleary eyes and looks up into the angelic face of the only person in the world who

loves her — her mother. As she sees her mother's face above her, it seems that around her head is a halo. Her eyes clear a little, and she realizes the halo is just her mother's long, blonde, braided hair, wrapped about her head. As she looks at her mother's face, haloed by the blonde hair, she is conscious of the fact that there is the only person in the world who is concerned about her. Now, suppose that some years go by and her mother is taken from her, and at last she is left alone in the world.

Twenty-five or thirty years later, in some great city, there is a very fashionable party in progress. Most of the couples have already arrived, when there is a knock on the door. Somebody opens the door to a very fine-looking young man and a beautiful young woman. The young woman is dressed in the very latest style, and as she comes in all the other girls remark on how beautifully she is dressed. Then one of them whispers to another as she notices the young woman's hair, "Such beautiful clothes and that old-fashioned hairdo. Doesn't she realize that long braided hair, wrapped around her head in that fashion doesn't suit the clothes she's wearing?"

Then, to the amazement of all the other young women, as her husband helps her off with her coat, he turns to her and says, "Darling, you look wonderful tonight. That is such a beautiful dress and I think your hair is the loveliest that I have ever seen."

Whereupon the other girls in the room who have overheard him, begin to whisper: "That just goes to prove love is blind. He is so desperately in love with her he fails to see what is wrong with her hair."

No, love is not blind. Love is microscopic. As that young man looks at that hairdo he does not see it through the eyes of modern fashion. Nor does he see it through the eyes of the other women in the room. He sees it through the eyes of a little girl on the other side of the tracks who has always associated that kind of hairdo with the angelic face of the only person in the world during her childhood who loved her.

Do we see what had happened? There was a time in that young man's life when he fell in love with the young woman. When he fell in love with her there was born within his heart a desire to spend time in fellowship with her. As he spent time in fellowship with her he began to know her better than anyone else in the world knew her, and because he knew her,

he understood her. He knew why she acted the way she acted, why she thought the way she thought, why she talked the way she talked, and why she dressed the way she dressed. He knew her so well that he was able to see the world through her eyes.

Here is what the apostle Paul is praying may happen to the Christians of Philippi: I pray that you may love God, because if you love God you will spend time in fellowship with God. If you spend time in fellowship with God, you will know God, and if you know God, you will begin to see the world through the eyes of God.

When you see the world through God's eyes you will see it as God sees it and you will know, instinctively, what is right and what is wrong, where you can go, where you cannot go, what you can do, what you cannot do.

Paul is simply elaborating more fully on the principle that Jesus is teaching in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Luke: we need to check our treasure chest or our thesaurus. If our thesaurus contains love then we may rest assured that our actions will demonstrate love. The possession of this kind of a treasure chest or thesaurus is absolutely impossible until the Spirit of God transforms our lives completely. Sometime during the middle of the 19th century the London clergyman, George Croly expressed this beautifully in his hymn:

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart:
Wean it, from earth, through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,
And make me love thee as I ought to love.

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things” (Mat. 12:35).

Part Three

Masses and Individuals — Chapter 7

Devils and Swine — Chapter 8

Jews and Samaritans — Chapter 9

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region around about.

Luke 7:11-17

Chapter 7

Masses and Individuals

Jesus was in the business of crowds — huge crowds. The number of times that he dealt with people on a one-to-one basis are very limited. He was alone with Nicodemus, and the Syrophenician woman who asked him to heal her daughter who was devil possessed. It would seem that only the disciples were present when Peter made his great confession, and only three of the disciples were with him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Apart from these incidents and a few others, Jesus was surrounded by large crowds most of the time: “And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them” (Lk. 4:42). This was one of the times Jesus was attempting to get away from the people

and he went out into the desert, but the multitude insisted on following him.

Another time: “And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret” (Lk. 5:1). This was the time he had to get into a fishing boat and push it a little distance from the land in order to be far enough from the people so he could teach them.

Once more: “But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities” (Lk. 5:15). He had just healed a leper, and that made him more famous than ever, resulting in ever-increasing crowds surrounding him, so that once again he had to withdraw from the crowd and go into the wilderness in order to have time to pray.

Again: “And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them” (Lk. 5:29). I doubt seriously whether Levi intended that such a large group of people would come to his feast. He planned it primarily for Jesus, but the crowd insisted on sitting down with them.

On another occasion, Jesus had spent the entire night on a mountain praying. When he came down from the mountain he called his twelve disciples to serve with him, and then as usual a huge crowd gathered around him. Luke refers to them as a “great multitude” (Lk. 6:17).

It is true that he had been alone with Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, but he was not left alone for long. The very next day he was surrounded once again by the crowd: “And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him” (Lk. 9:37).

Not only did large crowds continually follow Jesus, but it would seem that as his fame increased so did the crowds. They became larger and larger as his ministry continued: “In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another” (Lk. 12:1). Notice the emphasis on the size of the crowd. It was referred to as “an innumerable multitude.”

Jesus had gone to the home of one of the chief Pharisees on the Sabbath day in order to have a meal. While he was there

he healed a man of dropsy. Dropsy is an abnormal accumulation of liquid in some part of the body indicating some other more serious disorder in the kidneys, liver, blood, or heart.

Apparently, Jesus spent considerable time in this house teaching, but when he went back outside there was the crowd waiting for him once again: "And there went great multitudes with him" (Lk. 14:25). Once again we notice the crowds were great.

It is interesting that all of these passages about big crowds are found in only six chapters of the Gospel of Luke. Yes indeed, most of the time Jesus preached and taught to very large crowds of people. He must have been aware that there was no way he could reach as many people as he needed to reach by meeting with them one at a time.

In the church today we have a great many one-on-one methods that we use to reach people. When these are explained to us very often we are left with the impression that the best, and sometimes even the only way, we should propagate the gospel is by talking to individuals. Sometimes charts are worked out whereby the one-on-one system expands continually until we have reached a great mass of people. In this way, and only in this way, will we ever reach the world with the gospel.

This sounds good, but it is far from true. Just as Jesus found it necessary to proclaim his message to large crowds, so we must do exactly the same thing or we will never reach the world with the gospel. There are so many people to be reached that any attempt to do our work by reaching individuals one at a time will be a hopeless failure. It simply cannot be done. We must take advantage of methods that will reach large numbers at one time —mass meetings, television, radio and literature — if we expect to reach the entire world with the gospel.

This resurrection story of the text occurred just outside of the city of Nain. As Jesus and the disciples approached this city, they must have been walking up a slight incline and the funeral procession they met coming out of Nain must have been walking down the same incline. Nain was located on the elevation of land relatively close to that area of Galilee where Jesus spent a considerable amount of his time when he was in the province of Galilee. It was about 17 miles south from the

Sea of Galilee, 6 miles southeast of Nazareth where Jesus was reared, and 25 miles from Capernaum where Jesus made his headquarters.

The two processions met near the gate of the city. The gate was usually created by the two walls that usually surrounded cities in those days. It was a meeting place, and most of the farmers went through it at least twice a day. The funeral procession was on its way out of the city. In accordance with Jewish law, there was never any burial of anybody inside any town. The dead had to be taken out of the city for burial: "Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Lk. 7:12-13).

Jesus paid attention to the grieving mother first, and urged her not to weep any longer. Jesus did not condemn her because she was weeping. Perhaps Jesus understood better than any of us that this world is filled with sadness, and weeping could be expected. Much of our literature of all kinds dwells on the inevitability of sadness that will result in tears. James Montgomery (1771-1854), the Scottish poet puts it this way:

Beyond this vail of tears
There is a life above,
Unmeasured by the flight of years,
And all that light is love.

When the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley heard of the untimely death of his fellow poet John Keats in the city of Rome when he was just 26 years of age he wrote this extremely sad poem:

Whence are we, and why are we? Of what scene
The actors or spectators? Great and mean
Meet massed in death, who lend what life must borrow,
As long as skies are blue, and fields are green,
Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow,
Month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow.

The same note of sadness is expressed in many of our hymns. In the year 1871 Edward Hopper expressed the difficulty we face in this life in his hymn that is now a classic, "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me." He put it this way:

Jesus, Saviour, Pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treach'rous shoal;
Chart and compass come from thee,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

George A. Young had been the pastor of small churches during the latter half of the 19th century, but he supported himself primarily because of his ability as a carpenter. When he returned to his home from a short preaching mission on one occasion, he found it burned to the ground. He then wrote the words of a hymn that has become a classic, "God Leads Us Along." Once again we find that the heartache of this world is expressed — particularly in the chorus:

Some through the waters, some through the floods,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song;
In the night season and all the day long.

The Bible joins the poets of this world in expressing the sadness of life. One of Job's comforters, Eliphaz, the Temanite, says it this way: "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

King Solomon's picture of life is even more sombre than this: "For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity" (Eccl. 2:23).

When these two processions met near the gate of the city of Nain, our Lord's first action was to speak to the mother who had suffered the loss of her son: "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Lk. 7:13). Of course, this would have been a foolish statement on the part of Jesus, unless he had the power to remove the cause of her sorrow by raising her son from the dead.

While on this occasion Jesus had a crowd following him,

the weeping mother would also have been followed by many people. She would have been at the front of the procession, probably followed by official mourners. These were usually women who were hired to wail, rather loudly. They would be accompanied by flutes, cymbals and trumpets. In those days even the poorest of people would not go to the cemetery without at least one wailing woman and two flutes.

After he had spoken to the woman, Jesus proceeded to touch the *bier*. There is no single word that properly describes the manner in which the dead body was carried. Most versions of the Bible use the word *bier*, as does the King James Version. Several use the word *coffin*. The Amplified Version expresses it with the words *funeral couch*. William's Translation uses the word *hearse*. Actually, the body was carried on a sort of stretcher made of two poles connected by bands of cloth or leather material. It was not a coffin, as we understand the word, but rather a portable frame. The body would not be covered with anything except clothes.

The Bible tells us that Jesus went straight up to the bier and touched it. In all probability he then looked directly into the face of the dead body and spoke to it, as if the boy was still alive: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise" (Lk. 7:14). Whereupon, the young man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus turned him over to his mother.

All four of the gospel writers tell stories about resurrections Jesus performed. Matthew, Mark and Luke relate the story of Jairus' daughter. She was dead but had not been carried out of her home yet. Only Luke tells the story of the resurrection outside the gate of the city of Nain. This young man was dead and was being carried out of town. John tells the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was dead and had been in the grave for four days. In each of these three situations Jesus restored the person involved to their family. Jairus' daughter was given back to her parents. The young man at the city of Nain was given back to his mother, and Lazarus was returned to his sisters, Mary and Martha. One of the things we should see in these three resurrection stories is our Lord's interest and concern about family life.

If this story had been a part of a modern drama there would be three leading characters that would demand our attention:

1. We Should Notice God In His Providence

Were these events just a series of coincidences? The son had just happened to die. His mother just happened to be a widow. It just happened that she was taking him out of the city to the place of burial on this particular day. She could have gone through any one of the city's gates, but she just happened to choose this gate. Jesus and his disciples, followed by a large crowd, just happened to be approaching this particular gate of the city of Nain, and the two processions just happened to meet. In other words, was it all by accident or by chance that this event took place?

I think it is important we realize that with God there are no accidents. He has planned everything, from beginning to end. The Bible is the book that tells us the stories of God's plans. Abraham was about to kill his own son and present him to God as a burnt offering, when we find these words after the angel of the Lord had called out and stopped him: "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Gen. 22:13). Was that a coincidence? Was it just an accident that a ram got caught at just the right time and in just the right place, so that Abraham would find him?

Among the many women who must have come to draw water from the well outside the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia, was it just an accident that Rebekah came to the well at exactly the same time as Abraham's servant, whom he had sent to find a wife for Isaac? "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Micah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder" (Gen. 24:15). Was this just a lucky accident?

Did Ruth, the Moabitess, just *happen* to meet Boaz: "And Ruth, the Moabitess, said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (Ruth 2:2-3).

Once again, is this just the story of something that happened by chance?

The Bible is very clear about this. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing is a coincidence. God controls everything — even the most minute details of our lives.

Nebuchadnezzar understood this. He was the King of Babylon from 605 to 562 B.C. And when he returned to his kingdom after living the life of an ox for some seven years, he makes this statement: “At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:34-35).

God expressed exactly the same concept through his Prophet Isaiah. It is made abundantly clear in the rendition that is given by the Living Bible: “This is my plan for the whole earth —I will do it by my mighty power that reaches everywhere around the world. The Lord, the God of battle, has spoken — who can change his plans? When his hand moves, who can stop him?” (Isa. 14:26-27, Living Bible).

David expresses it very beautifully in one of his Psalms. It is made even more vivid in the rendition of the Psalter:

Ere into being I was brought
Thine eye did see, and in thy thought
My life in all its perfect plan
Was ordered ere my days began.

2. We Should See The Widow In Her Despondency

She had already suffered the death of her husband and now her only son had also died. She was indeed in a pitiful situation,. We will not see how extremely she was suffering unless we remember the age in which she was living. In the first century there were very few positions available for women. In many cases, during those times, when a woman was left on her own, her only recourse was to become a beggar

or a prostitute. Surely she must have been asking herself: "Does God care? Has God died? Is there a God?" Perhaps not for precisely the same reasons, but because of other similar problems, there are many people today asking the same questions.

There is a considerable amount in the Bible about how we should treat widows, or anybody who is lonely.

Invite them for a meal: "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates" (Deut. 16:14).

Bake a cake and take it to them, or take them a bag of groceries: "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands" (Deut. 24:19). Most of us are not farmers and will never leave behind a sheaf of grain, but we could think in terms of those things with which we do deal — fruit baskets, cakes, meals and such.

There should be times when we go to bat, so to speak, for widows and other oppressed peoples: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17).

We are warned against exploiting this kind of person, including widows: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry" (Ex. 22:21-23).

On one occasion when Jesus visited the temple he noted in particular a poor widow putting in her offering: "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mk. 12:41-44).

Because they feared the widows would be neglected in the distribution of the food, the apostles appointed officers, perhaps deacons, to see this did not happen. The point is that God is concerned about the unfortunate, and particularly about widows (Acts 6:1-7).

James tells us that the care of widows is a good indication that we have really been converted: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27).

Paul tells Timothy it is the responsibility of children and grandchildren to take care of widows: “The church should take loving care of women whose husbands have died, if they don’t have anyone else to help them. But if they have children or grandchildren, these are the ones who should take the responsibility, for kindness should begin at home, supporting needy parents. This is something that pleases God very much. The church should care for widows who are poor and alone in the world” (1Tim. 5:3-5, Living Bible). If there are no children or grandchildren then the care of widows is the responsibility of the other members of the church.

3. We Should Focus On Jesus

Jesus, with his philosophy of compassion and concern for others, burst upon the Roman world when its major philosophy was Stoicism. The ultimate purpose of life for the Stoic was freedom from all disturbing desires. The Stoic attempted to be apathetic about all that was going on around him. Even his god was apathetic. To feel pain or grief at the misfortune of others was considered a weakness — unworthy of a wise person. True Christianity and true Stoicism were the antithesis of one another. When Jesus came into contact with this widow of Nain who had just gone through a great deal of sorrow, he was deeply moved: “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not” (Lk. 7:13).

The Living Bible states the same thing with different words: “When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with sympathy. ‘Don’t cry!’ he said.”

The New International version puts it this way: “When the

Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’ ”

Goodspeed translates it this way: “And when the master saw her, he pitied her, and said to her: ‘Do not weep’.”

The word used here is taken from the Greek word *splanchnizomai*, which is the strongest word Luke could have used to express sympathy. It should be said that on this occasion no one asked Jesus to perform this miracle, and no one exerted any faith. It came spontaneously from Jesus, without any sort of human prompting.

The Master spoke to the dead son: “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise” (Lk., 7:14). In the case of Jairus’ daughter he spoke to the girl: “Maid, arise,” and even though Lazarus had been dead for four days, Jesus spoke directly to him: “Lazarus, come forth.”

The apostle John tells us that on the day of the final resurrection, once again Jesus will address the dead: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live” (Jn. 5:25).

And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him; and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters: and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain; and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

Luke 8:26-33

Chapter 8

Devils and Swine

“What manner of man is this! For he commandeth even the winds and they obey him.” The disciples and Jesus had been travelling across the northern end of the sea of Galilee from Capernaum to Gergesa, when one of the fierce storms for which the sea of Galilee is famous broke out. Jesus had been sleeping, and the disciples had been so frightened they woke him up. Jesus then commanded the storm to cease and it did.

Gergesa was about six or seven miles from Capernaum across the northern end of the sea. It was a small and unimportant town, and would probably never have been mentioned again were it not for this story in the Bible. As they landed, they were met by a man who was possessed by devils. Matthew tells the same story and speaks of two men. It may have been that one of the men was a much more extreme case and left a more lasting impression on Mark and Luke, so that

when they told the story they talked only of the one person who was so violent. It is Mark that talks about the man's habit of cutting himself with stones, and Mark also gives the number of devils as 2000. The fact that the man could not be bound, even with chains, indicates that there was a supernatural power that was able to break any chains put on him.

The man told Jesus his name was Legion, indicating that he was possessed by a great many devils. A Roman Legion consisted of 6000 men. The devils begged Jesus not to send them into the "deep." The "deep" is probably the final abode of demons, the devil, the Antichrist, the false prophet and their followers: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). At their own request, Jesus permitted the devils that were possessing the man to enter a herd of swine which promptly fell into the lake and were drowned.

It is worth noting at this point that the Bible distinguishes between sickness and demon possession: "And his fame went through all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them" (Mt. 4:24).

There are some teachers in our world today that give the impression that all sickness is a result of demon possession. Therefore, the best way to heal people is to cast out the devil causing their illness. Of course, this is simply not true to the Scriptures. Devil possession and sickness are two entirely different things.

The people who lived in that district asked Jesus to leave. Apparently they were in the business of raising pigs and what Jesus had just done interfered with their business. They wanted their swine more than they wanted the Saviour.

This is vividly illustrated in the relationship that we all know exists between drinking and driving. "American research suggests that in almost half the cases studied, excessive drinking prior to the offence was evident in either the victim or the offender or both.¹ Any thoughtful person who reads this would immediately respond that if alcohol

kills, we should do away with it. "No," cries the drinker, "Give us our pigs — even if we do die."

The apostle Paul expresses the conflict many of us have with besetting sins that possess us very much just as the devils possessed the man in this story. It is expressed well in the Living Bible: "When I want to do good, I don't and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is: sin still has me in its evil grasp. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned, but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin" (Rom. 7:19-25, Living Bible).

In the words of our story in the Gospel of Luke, we might say: "Who will free me from my slavery to these deadly pigs?" The answer, of course, is Jesus Christ — both in the case of the devil-possessed man two thousand years ago and in the case of modern people in our day and age.

The man out of whom the devils had been cast asked Jesus if he could follow him and Jesus told the man to go back to his people and tell them what great things God had done for him, whereupon the man is said to have done so. We should not miss the point that God and Jesus are used in this passage.

1. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1986), Vol. 16, p. 855.

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face; and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

Luke 9:51-56

Chapter 9

Jews and Samaritans

We are overwhelmingly indebted to Dr. Luke for some of the most impelling and instructive stories that Jesus ever told. The Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the Publican Praying in the Temple are parables that have made a profound impression upon most of our lives and apart from the Gospel of Luke we would know absolutely nothing about any of them. All of these are to be found within the nine central chapters of Luke. This section begins with verse 51 of Chapter 9 and it concludes with verse 14 of Chapter 18.

As a matter of fact there are 27 parables in the Gospel of Luke and 18 of them are found only in that Gospel. Apparently Luke had access to some written work other

writers did not, or else he heard these stories from the people actually involved in them.

Jesus and his disciples were about to begin their last journey to Jerusalem. They started in Galilee where their headquarters had been throughout most of their Master's ministry. As noted earlier, the most direct route from the Province of Galilee to Jerusalem in the Province of Judaea would have been through Samaria. Samaria was approximately forty eight miles from north to south and forty miles from east to west. When they were fairly close to the border between Galilee and Samaria Jesus sent messengers to a Samaritan village to arrange accommodation for Jesus and his disciples and perhaps even some of the persistent followers who were always with the Lord. We are not told the name of the village but it may have been Ginae, which was a small town close to the northern border of Samaria. Apparently the messengers were treated rather rudely, and the Samaritans absolutely refused to give the group any sort of accommodation. When the messengers returned and gave the other disciples the bad news, they must have all become very angry. But James and John exploded: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Lk. 9:54). Their reaction must not have been unusual, because on one occasion Jesus referred to them as the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17). Jesus rebuked them and made it quite clear they were out of line and obviously did not yet understand what his ministry was all about.

The night was spent in another village that was probably in the southern part of the Province of Galilee. The next day they took the long route to Jerusalem — east along the border until they had crossed the Jordan River and then south, on the east side of the Jordan River through the district of Peraea. Then they would probably have recrossed the Jordan River to the city of Jericho, which would put them in the Province of Judaea. A little farther west they would reach Bethany, and then proceed to the city of Jerusalem.

The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans had started long ago in the 7th and 8th centuries B.C., when the Assyrians had attacked Israel and took many of the people captive to work as slaves in their own empire. The Northern Kingdom was almost entirely wiped out, and in Samaria there were some Jewish people left but only the very poor. When the

Assyrian empire moved pagan people from other parts of their empire to settle in Samaria there grew up a religion that was a mixture of Judaism and paganism. It was an adulterated or a half-breed kind of Judaism, and became very much despised by the “real” Jews who lived in the southern Province of Judaea.

The Old Testament describes this process graphically: “Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land of Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof” (2Kgs. 17:23,24). Farther along in the same chapter the Bible says: “So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children’s children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day” (2Kgs. 17:41).

The extreme hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans began in the days of Nehemiah, during the 4th century, when he came back with a group of the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The Samaritans asked if they could help and they were refused out of hand: “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us” (Ezra 4:3).

It would seem to me that the Samaritans must have been considerably more Jewish than pagan, or this hatred would never have emerged. Although they accepted only the books of Moses, they believed in the same God, Jehovah, and they built a temple on Mount Gerizim in which to worship him. Although the temple was gone by the time Jesus and his disciples lived, the mountain was still sacred to the Samaritans.

The historian, Josephus, brings this out vividly: “Now there arose a quarrel between the Samaritans and the Jews on the occasion following: It was the custom of the Galileans when they came to the holy city at the festivals to take their journeys through the country of the Samaritans; and at this time there lay, in the road they took, a village that was called Ginea, which was situated in the limits of Samaria and the great

plain, where certain persons thereto belonging fought with the Galileans, and killed a great many of them . . . upon which the Galileans were much displeased, and persuaded the multitude of the Jews to betake themselves to arms, and to regain their liberty, saying, that slavery was in itself a bitter thing, but that, when it was joined with direct injuries, it was perfectly intolerable.”¹

Josephus came very close to being a contemporary of Jesus and the disciples, although he probably lived a few years after their period, but he reflects the kind of feeling that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews, and when he was alive it was still a very flagrant issue. The Samaritans did not like Jews to travel through their land in any direction, but particularly when they were headed south to worship at the rival temple in Jerusalem, they became very bitter.

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51). Jesus turned in the direction of Jerusalem and began to move that way “with an iron will” as it is expressed in the Living Bible. This implies there was a temptation to run back. We are reminded of the garden prayer: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk. 22:42). Jesus knew exactly what was ahead of him, and the human part of the master was sometimes repelled by it: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day . . . who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem . . . But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table” (Lk. 9:22, 9:31, 22:21).

Jesus saw the evil coming and went out to meet it. Our Lord’s state of mind as he journeyed towards Jerusalem for the last time is described with different words and phrases by the various versions of the Bible. He faced this journey with determination (Berkeley), with resolution (N.I.V.), with an iron will (Living Bible), with steadfastness (King James), and with his mind made up (Good News for Modern Man).

At this point most of us would like to do some preaching. Preaching that might sound something like this: “There is a time in life to set your face against the problems and difficulties that you face. No matter how severe they may

appear, no matter how painful they may be and no matter how depressed they may make you feel, you should be able to face them. Just grit your teeth, dig in your heels and refuse to be turned aside. Remember, that ‘when the going gets tough, the tough get going’. This is what Jesus did and this is what you should do.”

I can hear the questions being asked even before this sermon has ended: “But how? Where do I get the strength? Who will help me?” Very few of us have not gone through periods in our lives when we have decided to do better. We have made resolutions. We have started a new chapter in the book. But in most cases it hasn’t worked. This passage gives the answer to all of these questions — at least the answer as far as Jesus was concerned. Jesus accomplished his purpose by looking beyond his suffering and his death, towards what Luke calls “his receiving up.” Luke uses the Greek word *analepsis*. This is the only time that this word is used as a noun in the New Testament. It is used as a verb thirteen times. In five of these passages it is used to describe our Lord’s ascension into heaven and his return to the fellowship he had known throughout eternity with his Father. He did not look at the cross. He looked at the crown. He did not focus on death. He focused on deliverance. He did not concentrate on the suffering he must go through. He concentrated on the satisfaction it would bring to him and the Father: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

In our Lord’s mind the cross was a stepping stone to the crown. When Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem it was not like the face of the modern jogger — determined and scowling with an I’ll-do-it-if-it-kills-me look. Perhaps there was a bit of a smile on his face that seemed to say: “Don’t feel sorry for me, Don’t weep for me. I can see the throne, the crown, the glory, the Father, the saints, the angels and the Kingdom.”

Only in this sense can it be said of religion: “It is the opium of the people.” The Christian religion contains a message that gives us hope for the future, and thus enables us to live with those problems we cannot change in the immediate present. But it does not follow that we should make no attempt to change the conditions of the present that can be changed. All

of us at some time or another have used this formula on a short-term basis to enable us to do whatever is necessary in the immediate present. Children face the sometimes tedious days of September, October, November and December by anticipating Christmas. This does not keep them from doing the work and the study that is required at school, but they do have something to look forward to.

I use this principle almost every day of my life in order to get up in the mornings. I am much more of a night person than a morning person. As long as I can remember I have hated to get up in the morning. However, it makes it a great deal easier for me if I am looking forward to something that is going to happen on that particular day. Like the school boy, it does not prevent me from rising, it gives me a reason for doing so. Even apart from religion, this is a good psychological principle, and all of us make use of it sometimes.

For those of us who may have buried a loved one part of the message of the Christian faith is this: Look up from the grave, from the casket and the hopelessness, and see your loved one in heaven. Even as we throw the last shovel of dirt into the grave we need to remember that the person we loved is already hearing the chorus of the angels, and is already in that place where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:12).

For those of us who may have heard bad news from our doctor, the message says: Look beyond the sickness to the cure and the recovery. Look beyond the surgical operation to a better physical life afterwards.

But my sickness is terminal! My doctor told me so in unmistakable terms. And, of course, if I am not a Christian my doctor is quite right. I have no hope, and my only expectation for the future is eternal separation from God. But if I am a Christian I can look beyond the disease, beyond the dying and beyond the grave. I like the hymn that compares dying, for the child of God, to crossing the Jordan River:

When I come to the river at ending of day,
When the last winds of sorrow have blown;
There'll be somebody waiting, to show me the way,
I won't have to cross Jordan alone.
I won't have to cross Jordan alone,

Jesus died for my sins to atone;
When the darkness I see, he'll be waiting for me,
I won't have to cross Jordan alone.

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owner.

For those whose marriage may be in a shambles the message is this: It's bad. You can't make the problem disappear, but you can look beyond the problem. For the Christian there is always a better day ahead.

My father, Oswald J. Smith, wrote these words along this same line:

The Saviour can lift every burden,
The heavy as well as the light;
His strength is made perfect in weakness,
In him there is power and might.

The Savior can solve every problem,
The tangles of life can undo;
There is nothing too hard for Jesus,
There is nothing that he cannot do.

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The first message I find in this passage from the *Gospel of Luke* is that there is a time to set our faces against the problems of life, and one of the principles that enables us to do so is that the Christian faith gives us hope for the future enabling us to bear the burdens of the present.

The second message I see in this passage is that spiritual zeal may be misguided: "And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Lk. 9:54).

It was only about seventy-five miles almost north of where they were at this time and just a few days earlier that John together with Peter and James, had seen the Prophets Elijah

and Moses transfigured before them on Mount Hermon. That remarkable experience must certainly have been very vivid in their minds, and perhaps it was not out of context for them to think about what Elijah would have done under similar circumstances. They may have remembered Elijah's confrontation with the king of Samaria, Ahaziah, when that king had suffered a very bad fall and was about to die. Elijah objected to the fact that the king had sent messengers to seek help from Baalzebub, the pagan god of Ekron, instead of going to the true and living God, Jehovah. God sent Elijah to intercept these messengers and he told them to go back to their king and tell him that he was going to die.

When Ahaziah heard this message, he sent one of his captains together with a squadron of fifty soldiers to do away with the prophet. They found Elijah sitting on top of a hill, and when he saw them, he said to the captain: "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty" (2Kngs. 1:11).

When the king sent another captain and fifty men to do what the first had failed to do, Elijah repeated the same kind of demonstration of the power of Jehovah. He called down the fire of God and blew them away (2Kngs. 1:1-12).

It is not strange that James and John suggested that they do exactly the same thing with the Samaritans who had refused to give them lodging: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Lk. 9:54).

Undoubtedly, they thought they were responding in a very scriptural manner, and with great zeal.

But Jesus was quick to point out their zeal was misguided. They were acting with the wrong kind of spirit entirely: "But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Lk. 9:55).

These men had been with Jesus constantly for many months, but they had missed his entire message: "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Lk. 9:56).

But the very technical Bible student exclaims: But, don't you realize that this verse is not even included in some of the better manuscripts? There may be some who are following with a version of the Bible in which this verse does not even

appear in the main body of the text, and this would include some very fine translations, such as the New International Version, the Living Bible, the Revised Standard Version and others.

We have just noticed how very natural it would have been for James and John to have made their comment about Elijah in this particular situation. I think it is equally natural that Jesus may have made some sort of a statement similar to the verse included in the King James Version. Whether it is in the best manuscripts or not, because in many other cases in the New Testament Jesus *is* quoted as saying that this is in fact the purpose of his mission on earth, we should look for, and expect to find the same message here. Here are just a few instances of this:

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mt. 20:27-28).

For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10).

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (Jn. 3:17).

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world (Jn. 12:47).

When he writes to Timothy the apostle Paul sums up once again this mission of his Lord: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1Tim. 1:15).

The King James translators most certainly caught the right message and spirit of Jesus when they included something that would reaffirm the purpose of the Saviour at this crucial point, whether they were technically correct or not. At any rate, this was an example of misguided zeal on the part of John and James.

Another good example of misguided zeal is found in the

Old Testament. Moses had led the children of Israel into the desert of Zin where they stayed in Kadesh. Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, had just died and they had buried her. In this desert place, of course, there was no water. The people began to grumble to Moses and Aaron. When Moses and Aaron consulted God, God said: "Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink" (Num. 20:8).

Moses did what he was told to do but instead of speaking to the rock, he struck it twice with his rod saying angrily: "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10)

Undoubtedly Moses thought he was being very zealous. He was on God's side, doing the kind of thing he thought God would have done. Moses was going to tell these people they had no right whatsoever to complain and grumble against him. After all he was God's man. He was the one who talked with God. He was a chosen prophet. And now he was going to act the part of a prophet.

As a result of this action, God excluded Moses and Aaron from ever leading the people into the Promised Land. If we could have talked to Moses just after God had condemned him, we would have discovered he was very hurt by what God had done. After all he was helping God. He was standing for righteousness. He was doing a good thing. He was the most zealous person in the world at that time — and feeling extremely sorry for himself.

Calling down fire on the Samaritan village and striking the rock in the desert of Zin are both examples of misguided zeal. In the history of the church we can find other examples of exactly the same thing. The Crusades by the Christian church against the Moslems in the Holy Land are an example of misguided zeal. The first Crusade in the year 1095 was launched as a result of the preaching of Pope Urban II. For several hundred years after that, during the middle ages, great armies headed for Palestine in order to rescue the city of Jerusalem from the Turks. Undoubtedly, amongst their number were some people who joined their ranks for ulterior motives of their own, but certainly in the beginning both the

Popes that encouraged the Crusades and the armies that fought in them believed they were doing a good thing. What could be better than to establish Christianity — even by force of arms if necessary.

The Inquisitions were another attempt by the Roman Catholic church to do exactly the same thing. They were authorized by Pope Gregory IX in the year 1231. It was Innocent IV who officially authorized torture as a legitimate method to induce people to recant. The Spanish Inquisition is probably better known than most of the others, although Spain was by no means the only country that felt the lash of the Inquisition. The first grand inquisitor in Spain was the Dominican Tomas de Torquemada who is credited with having burned at least two thousand people at the stake — and this number is probably a low estimate.

At any rate, those ghastly years of torture and maiming and death were an attempt by the Roman Catholic church to tell the world that it was a good thing to commit these atrocities if it resulted in the Christianization of the people involved.

The disciples had some of the characteristics of the crusaders and the Inquisitors. If Christian men and women during the middle ages had listened to the voice of Jesus they would have heard him saying: You have missed the whole purpose of my mission. You know absolutely nothing about the spirit with which I came into this world. If they had heard this voice, and listened to it, there would have been no Crusades and no Inquisitions.

My father's lifetime motto was "No attack, no defence." This was the motto of the apostle Paul, although he didn't say it in quite the same way, but it was his rule of life: "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21).

Isaiah prophesied that when the Jewish Messiah came his motto would be very much the same: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as

a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:7-9).

William Barclay quotes John Wesley as having said: "I have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ from a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he takes his wig off and shakes the powder in my face I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible."²

Rather than having misguided zeal in defending ourselves or defending religion, we need to adopt some form of my father's motto — "No attack, no defense," which he developed directly from the teaching of the Bible, both in the ministry of our Lord and in the ministry of the apostle Paul.

Pamela Lyndon Travers says it well when she puts the words into the mouth of her internationally known character, "Mary Poppins": "Just a little bit of sugar makes the medicine go down." Perhaps in the context of this message we could ask "Mary Poppins" to say it negatively:

Don't call fire down from heaven,
Or strike the rock, Strike the rock, Strike the rock;
Don't call fire down from heaven,
Or strike the rock;
That's a most offensive way.

1. Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), Book XX, Chapter 6, p. 127.
2. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Luke* (Burlington: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1975), p.130.

Part Four

The Samaritan Who Helped — Chapter 10

The Prayer That Persisted — Chapter 11

The Fool Who Was Intelligent — Chapter 12

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Luke 10:30-35

Chapter 10

The Samaritan Who Helped

The story of the good Samaritan was prompted by one of the classical religious questions of those days. In the modern world some of the classical questions about the Christian faith would be: Where did Cain get his wife? Why does God allow suffering? What happens to people who never hear the gospel? Will God condemn them? How do we know that the God of the Christian Bible is any better than the god of the Koran? These questions are usually posed during religious discussions and, in most cases, have no final answers.

The man who asked this question is described as a lawyer. He was a specialist in the first five books of the Bible. In all probability he was a professional teacher and expounder of the Mosaic law. He was a classroom man. In the modern world he might have been a professor in some department of the university.

The man's question sounded quite sincere: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" However, the Bible makes it clear that he was not really looking for the answer, but rather, he was hoping to put Jesus in an embarrassing position. The man knew that there were several different ways that Jesus could answer the question and he was ready for him regardless of which way Jesus went.

Jesus very quickly pushed this lawyer right back into his own territory — the law of Moses: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"

Of course the man knew his law and he answered immediately. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind and thy neighbour as thyself."

Jesus then told the man that he had answered his own question.

Now the tables had been turned and instead of embarrassing Jesus, the man had become embarrassed himself. He attempted to cover up by asking Jesus a second question: "And who is my neighbour?"

In order to realize how revolutionary our Lord's answer to this question was we need to remember that in those days many of the Jewish people felt their only neighbours were other Jews. The Pharisees restricted their definition even more. They believed that only other Pharisees were their neighbours. And so Jesus tells the story of "The Good Samaritan" — a story that most of us have known almost as long as we have known anything. This story is even known and sometimes believed by people who make no great profession of being Christians at all. Before dealing with the story it might be worthwhile for us to talk a little about this business of asking religious questions, particularly at certain times in our lives and under certain circumstances. The lawyer in this story probably had the answer to his first question concerning eternal life written down in the phylacteries that he wore on his forehead and wrist. These were little square boxes about one half inch up to one and half inches wide in which handwritten portions of the law of Moses were kept, and in this form were carried by devout Jews most of the time.

Perhaps, indeed, he asked the question, not only with the intention of embarrassing Jesus, but with the purpose of

steering Jesus away from some personal problem of his own. We often do this with our modern religious questions. A university student will sometimes try to cover up his own pre-marital relations by asking a deep question about the inspiration of the Bible. Sometimes the girl that comes to the counselling room seems to be very concerned about why God slaughtered the Canaanites but in reality she asks her question to cover up the fact that she has been going to bed with her friend's husband.

The man in our Lord's story who was making the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho alone was doing a foolish thing. He was asking for trouble. That particular road is on a rather steep decline. Jerusalem is approximately three thousand feet above sea level, and Jericho is only one thousand feet above sea level making a decline of nearly two thousand feet in a road that was only seventeen miles in length. It goes through some mountainous territory and it is very rugged and rocky. Apparently it was a natural place for highway robbers to carry on their business and everyone knew this. We know almost nothing about the victim of this robbery. It is very likely he was a Jew, otherwise Jesus would have identified him as a member of some other nation. Apart from this conjecture we know nothing about this man's colour, religion or financial status. We are only told that he was a human being in trouble. It seems the three other travellers Jesus described were also going from Jerusalem to Jericho alone. They were just as foolish as the victim of this robbery. None of them should have been travelling down this road by himself.

The Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan are good examples of the various attitudes people take towards those who are in some sort of personal trouble:

1. The Priest

The priest deliberately walked over to the other side of the road so he would not be forced to look at the man who was in trouble. He would probably represent the largest group of people in the world at this time in history.

Almost every year I journey to one of the very needy countries of the world. I take a very small television crew with me and take pictures that will show the conditions in that country. Then I go back to Toronto and hold a telethon that

usually lasts for three or four hours and reaches from coast to coast in Canada. During the telethon I describe the country I have just visited and show some of the films that were taken. This gives me an opportunity to raise money and send it back to that country — money that will help alleviate their difficulty. These trips have included such countries as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Mali and Papua, New Guinea. They are usually triggered by a drought that has caused a famine or some other natural phenomenon that has created desperate needs among the people. When I go back to Canada and show these pictures and talk about the situation in these countries I am always amazed that inevitably there is somebody in my audience in Toronto that is a citizen of the country I am talking about, and he will come up to me after the telethon and tell me I have given a false impression of his nation: "I live in that country and it is not as you have been describing it at all." This is despite the fact that I have just shown pictures that were taken right in his country.

It seems to me there is only one explanation of this. Many of us live for years in a country and refuse to look at the problems. We refuse to see the dirt, the starvation, the disease or any of the other severe difficulties that may surround us on every side. We are very much like the priest who crossed the road lest he be forced to help the hurting man. If we see a needy person our conscience demands that we do something about it.

2. The Levite

The Levite might describe those of us who feel that we cannot waste our time helping one needy person because we are doing something that is far more important. We are engaged in an activity that may help thousands of needy people. Some of us are willing to preach the gospel on a foreign mission field but we have never helped in the work of the Rescue Mission or the street-meeting in our own city. We are like the lawyer who will accept the case of a criminal that is attracting national attention but has no time to help an old man with his will. We are like the doctor who might spend many hours on a delicate brain operation but has no time to set the broken arm of a child. It should be very easy for me to ignore the suffering in the immediate area where I am located

on the basis that I am helping so many thousands of people in some needy country overseas. In this respect many of us are like the Levite in our Lord's story.

3. The Samaritan

The Samaritan was the least obligated of all. However, his sense of mercy was flexible enough to make him feel responsible and actually do something for anyone whom God put in his path.

This story ends the same way it began — with a question. Only this time it is Jesus that asks the question: “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?” (Lk. 10:36).

There is only one answer the lawyer could have given: “He that shewed mercy on him” (Lk. 10:37).

Being a neighbour does not involve a geographical location as much as it involves a spiritual condition that results in action. I may live next door to a family, but I may not be their neighbour because they are in need and I have ignored it. My neighbourhood is the world and my neighbour is anybody in the world who is in some kind of need. It is true that we may see the need and still be powerless to help. Certainly, this would be implied in our Lord's teaching. However, if there is something we *can* do, then this story of The Good Samaritan declares we should do it.

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

Luke 11:5-8

Chapter 11

The Prayer That Persisted

It was not much of a house. It boasted one room, one window and one doorway. There were no partitions, but the small, one-roomed house was divided by an elevation of about eight inches in the middle of the floor, which was made of earth that had been beaten hard. The higher area of the floor took up about one-third of the space and was kept for sleeping purposes. The lower two-thirds of the floor was used as the kitchen, and for everything else that had to be done inside. There were thousands of other homes almost exactly like it that were owned by poor Jewish families who lived in the villages throughout the land of Palestine.

Jacob and his wife, Lottie, had put in a hard day, and they were glad that at last it was time to rest. The three children, a boy and two girls, had been asleep for about two hours. A half hour later Lottie had joined the children, and finally Jacob

blew out the candle and went to bed as well. The entire family slept together. They slept together because the space was very limited, and also because it was one way to keep warm. The small charcoal stove burned throughout the night in the centre of the kitchen floor. This also provided a little more heat for the family.

At midnight there was a tremendous pounding on the door and a voice could be heard crying out, "Jacob, Jacob, a friend of mine has just arrived. As soon as he came into my house I washed his feet, but then when I went to the cupboard to get something for him to eat, I discovered that my cupboard was completely bare. I have no bread to give him. He has been travelling at night to avoid the heat. Yes, Jacob, I know it's after midnight, but could you please give me three loaves of bread — one for him, one for me so that I can keep him company when he eats, and an extra one for courtesy. I would not want him to think he is eating my last loaf of bread. Or if he is extra hungry, I will give him the third loaf."

Jacob was awake by this time but he was blinking, trying to get used to the semi-darkness. He was awake, but he did not want to get up and let his friend in, because that would have aroused the entire family. They were lying so close to one another that it would have been impossible for one to have moved without disturbing the others. Jacob was desperately trying to think about how he could get rid of his friend, Samuel. By this time he had recognized his friend's voice: "Samuel, Samuel, be quiet! I just got the family to bed a few hours ago, and you know very well that I cannot get up without waking up the entire family. For goodness sake go home and come back tomorrow."

"But Jacob, I thought you were my friend."

"I am, Samuel, but I just can't help you now. Please go home! I'll see you tomorrow."

There was a long silence and then once again the pounding on the door began — bang, bang, bang. It sounded as if Samuel was quite prepared to continue knocking on the door of his friend for the rest of the night. He simply refused to go back to his own house, and not be able to give his travelling friend something to eat. No good Jew would be that discourteous: "All right, all right. How many loaves did you say you need? Three?"

"Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his

friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (Lk. 11:8).

This is a story about *importunity* in prayer. The word *importunity* is a translation of the Greek word *anaidia*, and this is the only time it is used in the Bible. The English word *importunity* is from the Latin *importunus*, and its basic meaning is *unfit* or *troublesome*. There are many other English words that could be used to say the same thing — determination, endurance, annoying, pressing, perseverance. The New International Version of the Bible uses the word *persistence*. The Living Bible reads "if you *keep knocking* long enough." The Amplified New Testament translates it *shameless persistence and insistence*. The Berkeley Version gives it a slightly different inflection by using "*brazen insistence*." As we read this story, we are continually thinking this is not the way friends act. It is simply an unthinkable, inconceivable, preposterous or absurd thing to say, unbelievable and outlandish! If the man had really been his friend he would have roused himself on the first knock, and been quick to give his friend at midnight whatever he needed.

But remember, we are talking about friends on earth. But this story is not about friends on earth, who are not even related to one another, but this is a story about God and his reaction to our prayers. God is not simply an unrelated friend of ours. He is our heavenly Father. He is interested in our prayers and he has promised to answer them.

After he has told the story Jesus makes his point. Prayer involves three things — asking, seeking and knocking.

Ask And It Shall Be Given Unto You

Asking implies belief in a personal God who can be contacted and will answer prayer. This is not the prayer of the agnostic: "O God — if there is a god — save my soul — if I have a soul." Jesus assumes that if we are going to pray, that in itself is an indication that we believe in the existence of a personal God.

In another story about prayer that Jesus told, there was a Pharisee that stood in a prominent place in the temple and prayed, I would imagine, in a rather loud voice, but it is interesting to notice that he did not ask for anything. He spent all of his time telling God what a great person he was: I am

not as other men, and he went on talking only about himself. His prayer could be described as totally egocentric.

The other man, a publican, was a little bit embarrassed in the presence of God, but he did ask for something. He asked for mercy. God wants us to pray and God expects us to ask, even though he already knows what we need: “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:8).

Then, why pray at all? Remember this question because we will come back to it farther along in this chapter.

Seek, And Ye Shall Find

Seeking involves asking, plus acting. God expects us to do everything within our power to bring about the answer to our prayers. Seeking involves some activity on our part. It is a translation of the Greek word *zeteo*. It is used a great many times in the New Testament in connection with the activities of people: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:33).

It is true that in this context seeking might involve no physical activity whatsoever. It could involve nothing more than our worship of God, our contemplation of God and our adoration of God. This could be accomplished in our prayer “closet” without venturing into the public world in any manner, but when we consider some of the other passages in the Bible using the same word, it becomes obvious that some kind of physical activity would be expected: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). In this case it is quite clear some kind of activity is involved. Notice the verses that follow. The apostle Paul is clearly describing an active life in this world. By way of contrast, he describes a number of negative activities — fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness. Paul is talking about the way we should not act. He does exactly the same thing from a positive standpoint, saying such things as: Set your affection on things above, mortify your members, put off, lie not, put on the new man, forbear one another, forgive one another, and put on charity” (Col. 3: 2, 5, 9, 10, 13 and 14).

The physical activity is clearly indicated in verse seven: “In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” The Christian way is a walk through life with God and, of course, it is difficult for us to think about walking without visualizing activity of some sort. We should not only worship God, we should act every day as people who *do* worship God. We should not only contemplate God, we should act as those who *do* contemplate God. We should not only adore God, we should act as if we *did* adore God.

James stressed this principle more strongly than any of the other New Testament writers: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18). It is seeking then that puts feet on our asking. James would be the first to say so.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Mt. 13:45- 46).

Suppose this merchant should say, “Lord I want a pearl. Please give me a pearl.”

God’s response to such a request would be: “Look for it and I will help you find it.”

When the apostle Paul visited the Bereans he found a group of people who had a great desire to come to a deep understanding of the Scriptures, but they put feet on their desire by searching “the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were seekers.

The Psalmist had a similar longing to know the Scriptures but he too put feet on his longing: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:2). The Psalmist was a seeker.

The Psalmist loved the Word of God and he put feet on his love: “O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). The Psalmist was a seeker.

There are a great many cases throughout the entire Bible in which people asked God for something and then they put feet on their asking. They were seekers.

In The Peoples Church in Toronto we hold a World Missions Conference every year. One of the purposes of this conference is to ask our people to make a commitment about how much they believe they can trust God to enable them to

give towards our missionary work during the months of the coming year. We refer to this commitment as a Faith Promise. Some years ago one of my elders came to me and asked for special prayer. I assumed that he was ill or was facing a critical problem. When I questioned him he said there was no great problem; he just wanted me to pray that he would be able to keep a Faith Promise he had made. However, when he told me the amount, I thought he had made a very unrealistic commitment. He had filled in an envelope which indicated that in dependence upon God he would endeavour to give ten thousand dollars to the world missions work of The People Church during the next twelve months. There were a few people in our church who could give that much money, but Henry was not one of them. He was over seventy years of age and was retired on a very small pension. I felt it was quite foolish for a person in his financial bracket to expect God to enable him to give ten thousand dollars to missions. I was about to point this out to him when he told me his plan.

"I can live adequately on my pension," he said. "I am in excellent health despite my age, and I am going to find a job and work for missions. Whatever I make is already committed to this year's missionary offering. I believe I am still strong enough to earn at least ten thousand dollars or more. Pastor, I want to pray that I will find a job and that God will keep me in good health."

That day Henry and I made a sort of covenant: I would pray, he would work, and God would get the money. For more than seven years now Henry has been able to give in excess of ten thousand dollars per year. Generally, he gives it to me in person — a thousand dollars at a time. Henry Hebert was a seeker.

Knock And It Shall Be Opened Unto You

Asking implies believing there is a God. Seeking involves actions that demonstrate our belief. Knocking adds a note of determination to our asking and our seeking. There is an element of perseverance in all of these. We should not only ask but we should keep on asking. We should not only seek but we should keep on seeking. We should not only knock but we should keep on knocking.

Are we suggesting that our praying involves a struggle? This

parable about prayer can be interpreted two different ways. We can consider it to be pointing out similarities in our prayer life — that we should pray in the same sense as this man begged his friend at midnight to give him some bread. Or the parable may be interpreted as a contrast. Going to his friend's house at midnight and knocking until his friend responds might say this man is not at all like prayer.

At the beginning of this chapter the question was asked: If God knows what we need before we ask him, why pray at all? It is true that an unrelated friend is not at all like God. God is willing to answer our prayers. Therefore, it is not surprising to find some of the great Bible teachers interpreting this parable as a contrast. G. Campbell Morgan said: "God is no sleepy One in bed, wanting you to beg and pray, when you ask. When we are dealing with God, there is no need to beg and beseech."¹

William Barclay expresses almost the same thing: "The lesson of this parable is not that we must persist in prayer, it is not that we must batter at God's door until we finally compel him from very weariness to give us what we want, until we coerce an unwilling God to answer."²

At this point I would beg to differ with Morgan and Barclay. If this was the only reference in the Bible about struggle, persistence and begging in prayer, I would agree. But the Bible account of prayer, from *Genesis* through *Revelation*, is that prayer involves a struggle, an effort, beseeching, long hours and warfare.

One of the earliest instances of this in the Bible is the story of Jacob: "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:24-28). Notice the words that describe the struggle through which Jacob went — *wrestled, until the breaking of the day, travailed, wrestled again, I will not let thee go*, and finally, *prevailed*.

The Psalmist was very familiar with the struggle that was

involved in prayer: “As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me, Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55:16-17). It would be difficult for us to read this passage without realizing that the Psalmist was a “Prayer Warrior.” He did not recite his needs before God in a quiet, logical fashion. He repeated his prayer again and again, and apparently did so in a very loud voice.

David’s prayer life involved a battle, a struggle, and warfare: “Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Ps. 86: 1-4). There is obviously opposition in his prayer life, through which he had to make his way in order to gain the ear of God.

When God spoke to Jeremiah it was made very clear to the prophet that when he prayed there would have to be an intensiveness and an earnestness if he expected God to answer his prayer: “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:12-13).

The apostle Paul indicates that prayer is one of the weapons of our warfare: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness: And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:12-18). Once again we should notice the words in this passage that indicate the struggle — *wrestle, the armour of God, withstand, stand, and shield*. For Paul, prayer is the culmination of this battle.

Jesus Christ was familiar with the battle involved in prayer. On several occasions he prayed throughout the entire night. It is unlikely on these occasions that he was waiting quietly before the Father. No, there was obviously a confrontation of some kind. Perhaps we can see the warfare of our Lord's prayer life in the story of his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk. 22:44). It would be irresponsible for us to interpret our Lord's prayer in the Garden as if there was no struggle of any kind involved. The other gospels make it clear this struggle was repeated three times with exactly the same prayer: "And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words" (Mt. 26:44). Mark tells exactly the same story in slightly different words (Mk. 9:32-41). John alludes to this incident but does not describe it in detail. We should notice that to our Lord's prayer on this occasion the Father's answer was, "No!"

My brother, Glen, and I once shared a room on the third floor of an old house on Kendall Avenue in Toronto. The only other room on the third floor was my father's study. This room was not only the place in which my father worked, it was also the battleground of his prayer life. Very often my brother and I could hear the battle going on. Sometimes it was very loud. Quite often father would stop working and take time to pray — usually with other people who were there.

Two of his most consistent prayer partners were Alice Porter, his secretary, and Dr. E. Ralph Hooper. In a few years Dr. Hooper would become the personal physician of Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia. When they prayed my brother and I could clearly hear their voices from the other side of the attic. They did not pray quietly.

On one occasion I was sent up by my mother from the first floor to call my father to the telephone. Even before I started to climb the second flight of stairs I could hear the sound of their voices in prayer. When I reached the attic I decided I would quietly open the door and get my father's attention without disturbing the other two. When I did so, what I saw was a rather strange sight to a small boy. My father was on his knees, but sitting back on his heels. However, he did not remain stationary. He rocked back and forth as he prayed.

usually looking upwards. Alice Porter was not kneeling, but standing, but she did not stand still. She kept turning in circles counterclockwise. She, too, looked upwards as she prayed. Dr. Hooper knelt on the floor, and every once in a while he would punctuate his prayer with a single clap of his hands. What I saw were three “Prayer Warriors” in the midst of battle.

Before we write them off as three peculiar religious fanatics, take a good hard look at some of the results of those attic prayer meetings — a church in Toronto with four or five thousand members, a World Missions work that shares in the support of nearly six hundred foreign missionaries and nationals, a school with nearly seven hundred students between Junior Kindergarten and Grade 13, and the list could go on.

Conclusion

This was the kind of prayer life that our Lord exemplified and taught — continue asking, continue seeking, and continue knocking.

But it seems that much of our prayer goes unanswered: the sickness is not healed, the life is not spared, the burden is not lifted, the son is not reclaimed, the friend is not reconciled, the cause does not prosper, the wrong is not righted, and the faithful are not delivered. We feel like joining voices with the martyrs in heaven: “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10)

The answer to our prayers is always guaranteed. It may be yes, no, or wait. That is because sometimes we pray for the wrong thing. We think it will help us, but God knows it will harm us. Other times we want the answer in the wrong way. We want God to do it our way, but he always does it his way. And finally, sometimes we ask for the right thing to be done in the right way but we ask at the wrong time. We have not learned the lesson of the Psalmist: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14).

Ask, knock, seek. Keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking!

1. G. Campbell Morgan, *The God Who Cares* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), pp 206-207.
2. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, The Gospel of Luke (Burlington: G.R. Welch Co. Ltd., 1975), page 146.

And one of the company said unto him, Master speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he posseseth, And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Luke 12:13-21

Chapter 12

The Fool Who Was Intelligent

The crop was good. Almost too good. The barns were full and there was grain standing in the fields and fruit in the orchards. Obviously, the harvest had to be gathered and stored. The farmer decided to tear down his old barns and build greater.

He was in the midst of his plans for the future when God spoke to him, and called him a fool. When God calls a man a fool there must be something seriously wrong. It is so terrible a word to use as an accusation, Jesus once warned his disciples that if any man called his brother a fool he would be in danger of hellfire.

It is wise, then, to look closely into the character and the deeds of this man whom God called a fool and discover why God accused him. In many ways he is commendable.

Certainly God did not call him a fool because of his good qualities.

Wealthy

He was a wealthy man. God did not call him a fool for being wealthy. Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but He did not say it is impossible. God does not frown on wealth earned honestly, if it is used in the proper manner and allocated to its proper place in our thinking.

It is only when the *almighty dollar* takes the place of Almighty God that it becomes an obstacle to the Kingdom of God. God does not attach any particular stigma to the state of wealth. It is almost as easy for poverty to keep a man out of heaven as it is for wealth to do so. I know some people who make a god out of their poverty.

Industrious

He was an industrious man. Land does not produce a large crop unless someone has toiled by the sweat of his brow to plough it and cultivate it, to weed it and work it in such a way that the soil, the sun, and the rain have every opportunity of producing the crop.

At this point the Bible gives us concrete reason to believe that Jesus was talking, not about some lazy, careless individual who refused to work, but rather about a very industrious, hard-working man. That assuredly was a very commendable feature of his character.

Intelligent

He was a thinking man: "And he thought within himself" (Lk. 12:17). Here was a real problem with which he had to deal — a big crop and insufficient room in the barns. He sat down to think, and to decide how he might solve this important problem. God found no fault with him because he stopped to think.

God has given us a head and a portion of brains, and he intends us to use them. We need more Christian people that are willing and ready, and not too lazy, to think. We have a

certain amount of equipment with which to deal with life as we meet it from day to day, and God will not do for us what he has given us the power to do for ourselves.

Some Christians think of God as a sort of handyman who will solve all their problems for them, clothe them and feed them, tell them what to say and when to say it, and, in the words of Isaac Watts leave them to "be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?" (From Watts hymn, "Am I a Soldier of The Cross?")

I am reminded of the hypothetical character who was stopped by a policeman at one of the busy intersections of a large city. He had set out to cross the road with his eyes shut. When questioned why he was doing such a foolish thing, he answered the Lord, who cares for the lilies of the field and sees the sparrow that falls to the ground, would see he was not struck by a car. He seemed to have forgotten God had given him a pair of eyes with which to see his way across the street.

True, God supplies the food, but we must feed ourselves. God has supplied the eyes and ears, the nose and mouth, the arms and legs, along with all the rational powers we have, but it is our job to see they are used as they should be. The adage that came from the pen of Algernon Sidney in the middle of the 17th century is old, but I believe true: "God helps those who help themselves." The glory of being a Christian is not that we may have our work done for us, but that when we can do no more, and yet all has not been done, we can call on a never-failing source of supply and expect God to do the thing that to man seems impossible.

He was a thinking man, and for this God did not condemn him.

Ambitious

He was an ambitious man. He wanted to get ahead in the world. He was anxious to make something of himself. He was eager to succeed. This, too, is a commendable element in the man's character. God did not call him a fool for being ambitious.

Some people seem to have the idea that the ultimate in Christian living is to be a failure. Their theme song seems to be, "Oh, to be nothing!" They seem to believe the Christian

should not worry about getting ahead in life. He should not strive to succeed. He should not care about bettering his condition. He should be devoid of any ambition.

If God can be disgusted at all, he must be thoroughly disgusted with this attitude. Furthermore, if God has called us to do a certain job, no matter what sphere of life we may be in, we should strive to do it better than the person who is not a Christian.

And why not? Why should the Christian have no ambition? Why should he not succeed? The ordinary person goes into his profession or business alone. But we are the sons of God. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and when a Christian does anything, he does it not alone but backed by the almighty power of God.

Why be a failure when we can demonstrate the power of God in our lives by our success? Why be content to remain in the ditch throwing the dirt up, when by the grace of God we could be foreman of the job? There is nothing wrong with the man who does the digging. God never frowns on hard or dirty work, but there is something wrong with the man who digs without keeping his eyes on the top of the ditch and endeavouring to get up there eventually.

God does not delight in failures. We need more Christians who are leaders in our country. We need Christian reeves and Christian mayors. We need Christian shopkeepers and Christian police — men and women who are industrious — men and women who are leaders — men and women who are topping their class.

The most successful man in any town or city should be the Christian. He has all the power of God to help him. No, God never condemns ambition as long as it is turned in the right direction, and the glory is given to him. He did not call this man a fool because he was ambitious.

Respectable

This man was a respectable citizen. He had a good reputation in his community. The man who lives riotously and immorally, the man who does not work hard, the man who lives by night and sleeps by day, will not be as successful as this farmer. Good crops and fast living do not mix.

Progress and strong drink do not go together. Success does not come with riotous living.

This farmer must certainly have been respectable. He was the kind of man the local lodges and societies would like to have had as one of their members. He was a man who would add prestige to any organization. Everyone probably admired him and thought well of him. His signature would give a man a position. He was a good man, an upright man, a moral man, an honest man. And yet, as we read the narrative, we find, to our amazement, that God called him a fool. In the eyes of God this man was a fool for three reasons.

1. He Neglected His Soul

He spoke to his soul and said, "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). These are the things that should have been said to his body, for only the body with its capacity for sensation can take ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But for this man, soul and body constituted the man. He did not consider the fact that there was a part of himself — the real man — which he had neglected, a part that could not be fed and satisfied with the things that satisfy the body.

In modern language, he would be called a mechanistic materialist — one who thinks only substantial, concrete materials exist, things he can grasp, things he can see and feel and hear. Man, to the materialist, is a mere collection of chemical properties that react in certain ways under certain conditions. He is a bundle of nerves and sensations, a complex organism of stimuli and reflexes, a sort of machine satisfied by food and drink and rest.

The farmer was like the biologist who denies the existence of the soul merely because he cannot find it when he dissects the human body. As though everything that has a real existence can be found! Can we dissect the rose and find its beauty? Certainly not, but who will deny the rose is beautiful? Can we dissect the girl and find love? Certainly not, but do we deny the existence of love? Can we take the laugh of a child as he plays on the street, put it into a test tube, analyze it, and extract the joy? Certainly not, but the joy is there.

It is the things which are not material that make the world worthwhile — the joy in the heart of a child, the love of a mother, the protection of a father, the beauty of a rose, the

happiness in the wag of a dog's tail, the contentment in the "moo" of a cow, the satisfaction in the "purr" of a kitten, the harmony in the colours of a rainbow, and the glory in the crimson of a sunset. These are intangible, the things we cannot dissect, the things we cannot find; but these things are real, and valuable.

There are thousands of people who think of the world and of themselves as did this man. They forget that when God created man he breathed into the material of his body the breath of life, and that he became a living soul — a soul that lives forever, an eternal personality. In forgetting this, they forget to prepare for the needs of the soul, not knowing that the provisions they have made for the body must some day be left behind, that some day they must "shuffle off this mortal coil" and stand as living souls before God, unprepared.

God thinks of the materialist as a "fool," and the day is coming when he will call him by his own name.

2. *He Neglected God*

He thought everything he had was his own. Notice all the personal pronouns: "And *he* thought within *himself*, saying, What shall *I* do, because *I* have no room where to bestow *my* fruits? And he said, This will *I* do: *I* will pull down *my* barns, and build greater; and there will *I* bestow all *my* fruits and *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years" (Lk. 12:17-19).

In the Old Testament, reference is made to another man who was confronted with much the same problem. He, too, had reaped a great harvest, and he had stopped to consider what he should do with it. But notice the decision he makes. Self is entirely forgotten, and God is glorified; for he says, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" (Ps. 116:12). What a difference! In the one case the man makes plans for himself but neglects God entirely. In the other case the man forgets himself entirely, but remembers God.

What about us? God has blessed us. Have we remembered him? If we have not, then just as surely as God called this man a fool, he will call us fools because we have neglected him.

3. He Neglected Eternity

Here was a man who was concerned about the future, but his future was measured only in terms of time: "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years" (Lk. 12:19). From the endless extension of eternity he had segregated a few short years. All of his energy and brain-power had been concentrated upon preparing for these years, and eternity had been entirely neglected.

His greatest concern was to be happy while he lived upon earth. But the happiness for which he longed was always in the future. Before he could become happy, he had to complete a great building program. He would have had to spend years laying in a store of goods and in accumulating his wealth, and then — away off somewhere in the hypothetical future — he would take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But he never achieved happiness. That is always the experience of the person outside of Jesus Christ. Happiness is forever in the future. We strive for it, but never realize it. We reach for it, but never grasp it. It evades us at every turning. Our ship never comes in. We look forward to the years of retirement, when we think we can settle down and spend our wealth —only to find that when those years come we are too old to enjoy them.

How different is the experience of the Christian! For us, happiness is always in the present. Joy begins the moment we accept Christ as Saviour, and that joy continues throughout eternity: "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he" (Prov. 16:20).

This rich farmer neglected eternity, and lost for both time and eternity. Somewhere out in the great beyond he lives. But he lives the life of a lost soul. He is separated from God. He is separated from everything that is good and from all that makes for happiness. He is in hell — not because of his great sin, but because he planned only for his natural life, and failed to prepare for his eternal life. God called him a fool, because he neglected eternity.

If we, like him, are spending all our time and energy in preparation for this present life, and in doing so we have neglected eternity, God looks upon us as fools.

This man was commendable for many reasons, but he was a fool. We, too, may be wealthy. We may be industrious. We

may have great ambitions and lofty aspirations. We may be moral, above board, and held high in esteem by our friends and neighbours, but if we have neglected our *souls*, our *God*, and our *eternity*, regardless of our attributes, God calls us fools. Some day he will complete the indictment: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Lk. 12:20).

Part Five

Heaven Will Be Full — Chapter 13

Compel them To Come In — Chapter 14

Don't Forget The Bad Boy — Chapter 15

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto him, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

Luke 13:23-27

Chapter 13

Heaven Will Be Full

The majority of the people who followed Jesus were probably sincere. They waited with bated breath to hear every word he said. They did not want to miss anything. It is very easy to read the gospels and to get the impression that most of the crowds to whom Jesus preached were made up of hypocritical religious leaders. It is true that most of the questions Jesus discussed, and sometimes answered, came from people like this. They generally had some theological axe to grind, and simply wanted to get the opinion of yet another religious leader. However, this kind of person was not in the majority. Most of the people in those great crowds did not ask questions, except to one another, as they discussed the things Jesus was saying. They were humble and devoutly religious Jews. Most of them were not very wealthy. As a matter of fact they were probably quite poor and had not had

very much chance to have any sort of formal education. They crowded around Jesus and listened eagerly to every word he said.

The standards Jesus set in his teachings were so high that this kind of sincere follower would likely conclude that only a few, if any, would be able to measure up to them. One day they heard Jesus saying: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Mt. 5:43-44).

Hearing this, many of these sincere followers probably concluded there was no hope for them: "Who is there who could possibly measure up to these standards? Certainly they rule me out and also most of my friends."

This kind of person might come to the conclusion that not many people will be saved, but they did so by a very honest introspection of their own hearts and words and actions.

The question of this passage, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" did not come from one of the hundreds of sincere followers of our Lord. It was probably asked by one of the hypocritical leaders who were constantly confronting Jesus. The man who asked the question did not want an answer but an argument. He would have asked the same question to every religious leader he met. There are always a few people in every crowd who ask these speculative religious questions. It is just as true today as it was in the days of Jesus. In our modern Christian world, they ask: Can a saved person ever be lost? Is there any sin that God cannot forgive? Are there two second comings of Christ — the rapture which is the private return of Christ for his church and the return which is the public appearance to establish his kingdom?

Jesus never really answered this question, "Are there few that be saved?" He responded by saying they should not be concerned about how many will be saved but rather they should bend every effort to make sure they themselves were saved.

To the modern question: Can a saved person ever be lost? Jesus would have answered by saying: That is not an important question. What is important is whether or not you are saved yourself.

To the modern question: Is there any sin that God cannot

forgive? Jesus would have answered by saying: That is not important. What is important is for you to ask the question: Have I confessed and am I forgiven for the sins I do know about.

To the modern question: Will the church go through the Great Tribulation or will it be raptured before the Tribulation? Again, Jesus would have answered by saying; That is not an important question. What is important is to make sure that you are ready for rapture or tribulation.

In his day Jesus told the people they were asking the wrong question. The question is not: "How many will be saved?" but rather, "What must I do to be saved?" In other words, don't speculate but rather:

Strive To Enter In

But whatever happened to *by grace through faith*? The way of salvation has not changed. It is still through the grace of God and as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ, God's son. But it is easier to understand what Jesus was talking about, if we take ourselves out of the community of a Christian country and into the community of a non-Christian country. The people in these countries are saved exactly the same way as you and I, but there is a great deal for them to face up to before they accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. There is a good chance they will be disowned by their family. They must do everything within their power to face this issue. There is bound to be a lot of agonizing within their souls. They may have to leave their home, their village, and perhaps even lose their betrothed. This is the *striving* that must be done before someone in a non-Christian country reaches out to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

In a nominally Christian country the *striving* may not be as devastating, but it is still there. There may have to be a change in position or profession. There is every possibility that the unsaved girl to whom I am engaged will drop me immediately. Certainly I will have to start listening carefully to the teachings of Jesus and do everything within my power to keep them. These are the issues with which we must *strive* or agonize in the modern world before we are ready to make this kind of spiritual decision. Then Jesus adds some pressure by

telling these people they do not have forever in which to make this dramatic change in their lives. Someday:

The Door Will Be Shut

“When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are” (Lk. 13:25).

Jesus then goes a step further and describes the response of these people when they discover they are shut out of heaven: “Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Lk. 13:26-27).

Then in great consternation they protest he did know them, and they knew him. They used to eat together and they used to listen avidly to his teaching on the streets of their village. People who have lived in a Christian community all of their lives are still likely to make the same kinds of protests. They will say that most of their friends were Christians. Almost all of their social activities were connected in some way with the church. The President of the Bank says: “I used to play golf with the pastor of the church.” These are the people who will boast of the Christian community in which they used to live.

But now it is too late. The door is shut, and they find themselves on the outside. There are many people who would write this off as a scare tactic to frighten people into the Kingdom. And perhaps it is, but the moment I say that, I must remind myself that these are not the words of a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, a preacher or a pastor. These are the words of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to notice that most of the hell and damnation and judgment found in the Bible falls directly from the lips of the Son of God himself. It is not enough to be familiar with Christian people because we live in a Christian community. The people in our Lord’s story made exactly the same sort of claim. What is important is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Now Jesus adds another element to the message that is even more devastating. There will be:

Weeping And Gnashing Of Teeth

Most of the people to whom Jesus talked expected they would get into the Kingdom without any trouble. After all they were Jews. They belonged to the right nation. However, they had grave doubts about how many others would make it. Some of this Jewish thought of the first century can be seen in the *Second Book of Esdras*, which was written in Aramaic by an unknown Jew in about 100 A.D. This is one of the Apocryphal books, which have never been accepted by most Protestants as a part of the Scriptural Cannon. II Esdras throws some light on this exclusive characteristic of the future kingdom that the Jews held during the time of Jesus. They thought it was to be an elite kingdom, primarily for Jews: "And he answered me, saying, The most High hath made this world for many, but the world to come for few. I will tell thee a similitude, Esdras; As when thou asketh the earth, it shall say unto thee, that it giveth much mould whereof earthen vessels are made, but little dust that gold cometh of: even so is the course of this present world. There be many created, but few shall be saved" (II Esdras 8:1-3).

Although he doesn't actually say it, the underlying thought of Esdras in these verses is that the Kingdom of God will be made up primarily of Jews. It is this spirit of the Jews in the first century that Jesus addresses in the Gospel of Luke: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Lk. 13:28).

Jesus describes a rather pathetic picture which will be seen sometime in eternity. These people to whom he is talking, who thought that if anybody would get into the kingdom, the Jewish people certainly would, are standing outside of the kingdom, but they are able to see inside. They look, and there is Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. All three of them are safe inside. Perhaps one of them says: "Look! There's that publican who was beating on his breast in the temple. He made it. He's in the Kingdom. But the Pharisee who was boasting of his righteousness is not there."

I wonder if we should bring this picture a little closer and see ourselves and our friends in it. We see the pastor of our church. He is in heaven alright, but he is in one of the back

seats. Then we see the kitchen helper who could do very little but wash dirty dishes after the church banquets. He is in heaven, and he is in a front seat.

Jesus continues and observes that as far as his listeners are concerned, heaven is all mixed up: "And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which will be last" (Lk. 13:30).

It is this situation which causes a great deal of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This expression is repeated seven times in the gospels — six times in Matthew and once in Luke. All of them come directly from the lips of Jesus. This is a result, not only of the disparity between those who go into the kingdom and those who are shut out, but also by their realization that they are doomed to an eternity of never-ending wretchedness and everlasting hopelessness.

Most of us have a tendency to see ourselves outside of this sort of picture completely. Perhaps we should paint ourselves into the picture by quoting the words that were written by John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral:

Never send to know for whom the bell tolls
It tolls for thee!
And you, And you, And you!
And me!

But for the grace of God in Jesus Christ this indeed might be anyone of us.

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Luke 14:16-24

Chapter 14

Compel Them To Come In

Heaven will be very spacious and very full. Whatever accommodation God has provided for life beyond what we know here on earth will be like a country without boundaries, a world without poles or space without limit, but it will be well-filled with redeemed people.

Sometimes the Jewish people described the Messianic Kingdom in terms of a banquet that would be prepared by God: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things" (Isa. 25:6) — not just enough food for sustenance, but an overabundant supply of food given in the atmosphere of a festival. This is obviously a description of a tremendous amount of good food in the midst of an atmosphere of extreme happiness. Sometimes we describe Christianity with such solemnity that there is no place for any sort of frivolity or laughter. Most of us think of

Jesus as having been almost totally serious. He didn't play as a boy or laugh as a man.

Certainly when he "set his face to go to Jerusalem" he was on no frivolous mission. He was headed for crucifixion, but is it not possible to think that even then, as he considered "the joy that was set before him," his face broke forth in a smile that even his disciples did not understand.

In this parable of the Great Supper Jesus was using an analogy the Jewish people knew well. When the guests were invited, apparently they all accepted the banquet invitation. Then the host began to make the necessary preparations, and probably a day or so before the actual event he sent a messenger to remind his guests the time had come. Then they all began to make rather lame excuses, and said they were not able to come. They went back on their promises.

The first man had to look after his property. The second had to attend to his business. The third man had to spend time with his family. All of these were very good and important things to do, but were ongoing general activities of everyone's life, probably just as true at the time they received the first invitation as when the reminder came. In other words, they were simply excuses that were an offence to their host.

The excuses we hear today are usually in the same category. People will give good, and probably important reasons why they do not go to church, but when we look a little more closely at the lives of these people it often becomes evident their reasons are not valid: "I got too much religion when I was a child." Perhaps he got far too little. "Sunday is the only day I have to rest." But does he rest or does he play golf? "There are too many hypocrites in the church." Maybe, but can you name three of them you have met personally? "They're always asking for money." I wonder just how much he gave the last time he heard them ask.

This list of good excuses might go on and on, and some may be valid. However, the important question is whether or not they are valid for the person who is using them.

That My House May Be Filled

Certainly this is a parable about excuses, but it is quite possible for us to get so engrossed with the excuses we fail to

see what may be the main point of the parable — the very large population of heaven and how it will be achieved. In Chapter 13 we are told that somebody asked him the question, “Are there few that be saved?” (Lk. 13:23). Now, Jesus answers that question by saying that heaven is going to be full.

Some passages in the Bible seem to indicate that more people will be lost than will be saved: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereto: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt. 7:13-14) — *many* on the broad way and *few* on the narrow way.

“So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Mt. 20:16) — *many* called but *few* chosen.

“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved” (Rom. 9:27) — only a *remnant* saved.

The apostle Peter mentions the days of Noah when the entire population of the world was lost in the flood and only “eight souls were saved” (1 Pet. 3:4).

All of these passages would seem to indicate that the majority of people will go to hell and a minority will go to heaven. There is no passage in the Bible which actually compares the numbers of the saved and the lost. However, in this parable Jesus does not add any light to the comparative numbers of those who would spend eternity in hell and those who will spend eternity in heaven. His point is that heaven will be extremely well-populated. There are other passages in the Bible that indicate the same thing: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you?” (Jn. 14:2).

Perhaps the apostle John was thinking of the words of our Lord when he said: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Rev. 7:9).

In one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament the Prophet Isaiah states the same principle in prophetic language: “He shall see of the travail of his soul,

and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). It is highly unlikely Jesus would have been *satisfied* that he had accomplished the work the Father had sent him into the world to do if it had resulted in the salvation of only a small number of people. As a matter of fact, Isaiah emphasizes the large number of people that will be in heaven by using the word *many* — "but my house may be filled."

Compel Them To Come In

Jesus not only indicates that heaven will have a very large population, but he also states how this will be accomplished. If we think of the modern Christian church as being the "servant" in the parable, then it follows that Christians should do everything within their power, using every legitimate means, in order to get people into personal contact with Jesus Christ, so that they will become a part of heaven's population. The word *compel* in this context does not mean the use of physical force but rather, the exertion of moral persuasion to induce people to respond to the claims of Christ.

Sometimes we tend to criticize the methods others use in their evangelism, when we ourselves may be doing very little. We look at one group of churches and criticize them because we feel they are too formal and cold. They never sing anything but anthems. They never use gospel songs and choruses, and we conclude they are spiritually dead. Then we look at another group of churches and object to them because we feel they are too emotional. They pray far too loudly and sometimes almost dance in the aisles. Certainly we have every right to attend the kind of church that appeals to us, but we need to be careful we do not write off a church that may be reaching people we have never been able to touch.

It will take the best effort of all of us — the Charismatics and the non-Charismatics, the Calvanists and the Armenians, the Episcopalian and the Salvationists — using every legitimate means of moral persuasion, if heaven is ever going to be filled. And Jesus makes it very clear in this parable that it will be filled. Therefore, "compel them to come in."

The Poor, The Maimed, The Halt, The Blind

With the anger of his master's voice still ringing in his ears, the servant goes out immediately and invites everybody and anybody he sees to come to the supper.

Some of them were poor. At any given time during the history of the Christian church, by far the majority of Christians have been poor people. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have been born in one of the more affluent countries of the world sometimes get our material prosperity and our spiritual condition confused. Obviously, there is nothing spiritual about prosperity. Money cannot buy prosperity and prosperity does not produce spirituality. When he used this parable, Jesus probably included those who were poor as far as material prosperity was concerned, but undoubtedly, he also included those who were poverty-stricken from a spiritual standpoint — "the poor in spirit." The gospel is for the poor.

Some of them were maimed — bruised, beaten, battered and in some cases, just plain bad. These are the kind of people for whom Jesus has prepared a place in heaven. The gospel is for the girl whose life is in a shambles. The gospel is for the man whose business is ruined. The gospel is for those whose family is separated. It would seem that the only instructions the host of the Great Supper gave to his servant were to go out and get people — any kind of people.

Some of them were *halt*. The dictionary defines the word *halt* as meaning to walk with a crippled gait —to limp, to hobble, or to be uncertain. The gospel is for the person that has run away from home and has walked with a limp in his life ever since. The gospel is for the man who has left his wife and family and as a result he has hobbled through life. The gospel is for the girl who has become a prostitute, and she has moved on her path with a crippled gait. Jesus has prepared a place in heaven for the bank robber, the murderer, the embezzler, and for those who have done time. The gospel is for the *halt*.

Some of them were blind. Jesus undoubtedly meant those who had lost the sight of their physical eyes, but he also meant those who were blind from a spiritual standpoint. The gospel is for the man who is blind to the needs of his own family. The gospel is for the person who is blind to the

desperate needs of the poor. The gospel is for those who are blind to God's way of salvation. The gospel is for those who are blind to the fact that Jesus Christ died to save them from their sins. The gospel is for the *blind*.

The Highways And Hedges

Surely the servant could have found enough people in the city to more than fill even a very large banquet hall, particularly when he made no discrimination whatsoever in the kinds of people who were invited — the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. But his orders were clear: he was to go outside the city. The gospel is for the *outsider*. There are many things that make people *outsiders* as far as the church is concerned. Some are *outsiders* because they have had no religious background. Some are *outsiders* because they did not have the advantage of being born into a Christian family. Some are *outsiders* because they have never had any exposure to the church. And of course, some are *outsiders* because they were born into a family or a country that was from some other religion entirely. The gospel is for the *outsiders*.

Conclusion

What a motley collection of people this is! But these are the people for whom Jesus has gone to prepare a place in heaven. We come from every sort of background, and every degree of wealth, bearing every description of physical health. But we all have exactly the same basic problem. We are sinners and we need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. The Salvation Army caught this aspect of the gospel perhaps better than some of the rest of us.

The American poet, Bachel Lindsay, said it well in his poem "General Booth and his Followers Enter Heaven."

Booth led boldly with his big bass drum.
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The saints smiled gravely, and they said: 'He's come.'
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,
Lurching bravos from the ditches dank.
Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath
Unwashed legions with the ways of dead —
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?).

Heaven will be populated by the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind and the outsider. They will come from an unbelievable number of different backgrounds, but they will all make their way into heaven in exactly the same manner.

A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country: and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Luke 15:11-16

Chapter 15

Don't Forget The Bad Boy

The story of the Prodigal Son tells us there is a way for the erring child to renew his fellowship with God.

There are three different kinds of erring children mentioned in the Bible. There is the apostate. That is the person who has made a false profession of following the Lord Jesus Christ and has finally given it up. The apostate is typified by such men as Judas. It is quite possible that Judas was a true disciple right from the beginning, but when he thought Jesus was not about to establish his rule there and then, he may have been disillusioned and, only then, did he turn traitor. It is more likely he was not a true disciple, even in the beginning. Outwardly Judas began to follow Jesus on exactly the same terms as the other disciples, but in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he planted the kiss of betrayal on the Lord's brow, he declared himself to be an apostate. Sad to

say, we have many apostates, even in our modern Christian churches. We have Judas the soprano soloist in the church choir, Judas the elder, Judas the preacher, Judas the member of the Women's Missionary Society, Judas the Sunday School teacher and even Judas the missionary.

The apostate is the kind of person John was speaking about when he said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1Jn. 2:19).

Then there is the child of God who has slipped into some form of open sin or worldliness. In the Bible he is typified by such men as David and Peter — both of them undoubtedly sincere in their faith but weak in the flesh.

Finally, there is the Christian who has not fallen into open sin, but who has lost ground spiritually in some measure. He is typified by Thomas, the disciple. "Doubting Thomas" was not a great sinner, but he had deteriorated spiritually from the man he was when he had been willing to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus.

The story of the father and son in Luke's Gospel gives us a very beautiful picture of God. It is quite true that in many places in the Bible God is visualized as hard, severe, vindictive, righteous, and without feeling. But in the story of the Prodigal Son we see an entirely different aspect of the nature of God. We see him as a father — kind, loving, lenient, long-suffering, and patient. Until we know God not only as righteous and vindictive, but also as fatherly and loving, we have failed to see the biblical picture of God.

In the story we learn five things about God and the erring child:

1. *The erring child is quite often one who has been in close fellowship with God.*

The father in the story had only two sons. The Bible speaks of the Prodigal as the "younger." If there had been more the word "youngest" would have been used. This means the boy in the story was the baby in the family, and although the eldest son usually stands first as far as inheritance is concerned, everyone knows the baby in any family always stands first when it comes to love and affection. Normally, the

baby is spoiled, if anyone is spoiled. In most families he is able to get far more out of his father than any other member of the family. He usually holds the place of affection and favouritism.

This would mean the Prodigal was closer to his father personally than was the elder son. If the other boy had asked to have the inheritance divided ahead of time, he probably would have been refused, but because the father loved the younger son so much he weakened and responded. This, then, is the story of a son who was very close to his father, deliberately wandering a great distance from his father. It was the father's favourite who became the erring child.

The outstanding example of backsliding in the Old Testament is the story of David, but strangely enough, the story of David is also the account of a man who was probably closer to God than any other one character in the Old Testament. The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart. He was a spiritual giant among Old Testament characters, and yet he fell into the debauchery of murder and adultery (1Sam. 13:14, Acts 13:22).

In the New Testament the outstanding example of an erring child is the story of the apostle Peter, and again it is the story of a man who was in close fellowship with the Lord and drifted a great distance from him. Peter was probably in closer personal contact with Jesus Christ than any of the other disciples. He was always the most aggressive. He seemed to be the most devoted. He was the only one who dared to walk on the water or to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was there a great many times when no one else was there. He was one of the three on the Mount of Transfiguration and one of the three who followed Jesus the farthest into the garden. However, strange though it may seem, this man, who may have been closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples, became the erring child.

It is the one who has climbed up a long way who can fall down the farthest. Extreme contrasts in life often lie very close to one another. The musician knows there is just a hair's breadth between discord and harmony — one note can make all the difference. Psychologists tell us there is a very thin line between the genius and the demented. The Bible makes it very clear that in one sense at least it is not very far from the greatness of spirituality to the gutter of sin. That is why the

Bible says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (ICor. 10:12). The erring child is quite often one who has been in close relationship with God.

2. The erring child does not plunge into open sin and worldliness all at once.

It took a long time and it was a great distance from the wealth and fellowship of the father's house to the wretchedness and famine of the far country. There were a great many miles and a great many circumstances between the two. That is why we usually refer to the erring child as a backslider. We do not call him a *back-runner*, or a *back-jumper*. The way down is long, hard, and slow.

Have you ever noticed how the roadway winds down the side of a mountain? As you drive down the road twists and turns so much you are almost unaware of the fact that you are descending, but after you have driven for half an hour along comparatively gradual slopes and then look back up, you see how far down you have come without realizing it.

The road into the far country starts with temptation, the temptation becomes a thought, the thought becomes a desire of the heart, the desire of the heart becomes a secretive act, and at length the secretive act becomes an open sin. The erring child does not plunge into open sin and worldliness all at once.

3. The erring child usually goes through two stages in the far country - indifference and anxiety.

At first the backslider is *indifferent* to his condition. If we read the story in Luke and stop at verse 13, we will see the Prodigal in the far country, out of fellowship with his father, but entirely indifferent to his own condition. He was still spending his substance in riotous living, he was having a good time, he was getting a thrill out of life, and he looked for sympathy from no one.

If we were to have approached him at this point in his wandering, we would have found him filled with excuses that seemed perfectly logical in his own mind as to why he had left his father's home.

His most prominent excuse would probably have been his

feelings for his elder brother. Obviously, the two boys did not get along very well, because even after the Prodigal returned, the elder son was jealous and embittered, because his father treated him so well: "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in" (Lk. 15:25-28). This feeling had probably been there throughout their lives, even as boys, and when the younger son was tempted by the far country, he used his brother's maltreatment as his excuse for breaking the heart of his father.

Usually there is a stage in the wanderings of every backslider when he lays the blame on some Christian who has mistreated him, perhaps an official in the church, or even the pastor. As long as he can blame it upon some other person, he will be indifferent to his own need and to the longing of his Father God for his return.

At the end of verse 13, the Prodigal did not see his father's broken heart nor did he understand his longing for the return of his beloved son. He was not moved by the fact that he had caused his father's hair to turn grey. He was hard, cynical, and indifferent. He had plenty of money left and he still had his brother to blame.

If in the midst of his indifference the modern backslider could only see that he has used the maltreatment of some Christian as an excuse for turning his back upon a God who has never let him down, I am convinced he would think seriously about returning. That is why God spoke to the children of Israel in the midst of their backsliding and said, "Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me . . . For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:5, 13).

The glamour of the far country and the sensual thrill of riotous living has blinded the eyes of the modern erring child to the fact that he has forsaken a father who loves him a great deal, and he is blaming it upon a Christian who does not seem to love him at all. He has given up the real comfort and

security of his fellowship with God for the fake and false security of the world, the flesh and the devil. He has turned his back on the cistern that is filled to the brim with living water and has embraced broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Perhaps some of us are at this stage in our wanderings from God — still satisfied with the world, bitter against God, and completely indifferent to our own needs spiritually. Surely we can see that although Christians may have let us down, God has never forsaken us. Christians may have broken their promises but God has always been faithful to his Word. We should not blame God for what other people have done to us. Nor should we forsake God because we feel the organized church has forsaken us. Let us not sacrifice permanent fellowship and communion with God on the altar of immediate frivolity in the far country, and then blame it on the members of our church.

To the end of verse 13 the Prodigal Son is indifferent, but from the beginning of verse 14 to the end of the story he becomes exceedingly *anxious*: “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want” (Lk. 15:14).

The erring child may be indifferent to God and his own condition for many years but eventually the time will come when he will be anxious. He may pursue the bubble of sin for a season but some day the bubble will break. There is joy in the world, but it is temporary. There is satisfaction in the far country, but it is limited. There are thrills in the service of Satan, but not indefinitely. The world’s river of joy always empties into a pool of tears. The wells of satisfaction in the far country inevitably turn bitter. The waves of thrill in the service of Satan will eventually dash the erring child against the rocks of misery and despair.

There was a time when the Prodigal lived riotously, but there was also a time when he began to be in want. In verse 14 he is sick of his sin, wandering, and anxious for the fellowship, blessing, and security of his father’s home. “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger” (Lk. 15:17). The erring child goes through two stages — indifference and anxiety.

4. When the erring child returns to his father he is not scolded for his sin but is welcomed with open arms and forgiven with a kiss of love.

The account says the father *ran* to meet the son. He ran lest his son change his mind and go back to the far country. He ran lest his son fall, exhausted, and fail to complete his journey. He ran lest some new evil overtake him before he reached the shelter of his father's house.

And that is the way God welcomes the return of his erring child. When the backslider starts for God, God starts for the backslider.

Not only did the father run to meet his son, but when he reached him he kissed him. He did not scold him for his wandering and his sin. He knew the far country had taken its toll and inflicted its own penalty. The boy had long since lost his money and his friends, he had been lowered to the position of a swineherd, and when he came home his clothing was tattered, torn, and worn and his own mind was bewildered, confused, and upset. Sin had left its marks; there was no need for more scolding.

Modern backsliders are in exactly the same condition. Very seldom is there need for scolding and rebuke on the part of the children of God. The wanderers have already paid the penalty of dissipated bodies or tormented minds, and within their hearts there is a longing for fellowship with the children of God and reunion with God himself.

They do not need rebuke. They need reception. They do not need to be chided. They need to be comforted. The father in the story knew this and so he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

Not so with the elder brother. He was suspicious and jealous. He doubted the reality of the wanderer's repentance, and he would much rather have held him at arm's length or kept him in the position of an outcast than have received him as warmly and lovingly as did his father.

Many Christian people rejoice at the return of the backslider and do everything within their power to welcome him, love him, and make it easy for him to renew his fellowship; but, sad to say, the erring child often returns to the Church of Jesus Christ and finds it besmirched with elder brothers — people who have such an unearthly sense of

spiritual superiority that they feel they are in a position to doubt the reality of another's sincerity.

It is not for us to question the reality of the erring child's repentance, but it is our business to forgive him as God forgives him and take him under the shelter of our wing as quickly as possible, praying God to keep both him and us from ever falling again.

"But what about his sin?" questions the Christian who has been fortunate enough, by the grace of God, to have resisted temptation. If sin is confessed, it is under the blood, to be remembered against him no more: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness . . . I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (1Jn. 1:9; Isa. 43:25). We are not naturally any better than the backslider, but the mercy of God has protected us, and but for the grace of God we might all be in exactly the same position as the erring child.

Oh how many wanderers there are who live within a stone's throw of the fellowship of Christian people in a Christian church but who are separated from that fellowship by a vast desert of criticism, gossip, and self-righteousness among people who are in the church! Undoubtedly some day those of us who are responsible will have to reckon with God.

5. When the erring child returns, it is usually to a place of greater blessing, sweeter communion, and more active service.

The Prodigal Son was given a robe because he had been forgiven for his wandering and was immediately restored to his former status. The father might have asked him to live in the slave's quarters until he had proved himself. The robe would also act as a covering for the scars of sin the far country might have left on his body. A ring was placed on his finger because his father considered him a member of the family. Shoes were put on his feet because now he could be of service to the family. The fatted calf was killed because at last he was able to enjoy the blessings of the family. And finally, a banquet was prepared because he was again to experience the satisfaction and joy of living in fellowship with the family. His position after his return from the far country was in many ways superior to his position before he had left home.

And so it is with the backslider. He is forgiven for his sin and robed in the righteousness of the Son of God. His heavenly Father has welcomed him and restored him to a position of good standing in the family of God. His feet are “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” and now, more than ever, he can be of service to his Saviour (Eph. 6:15). The blessings of God as a fatted calf are spread before him and all the resources of heaven are available to him. After years of wandering he thrills again to the joy which is “unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pet. 1:8). After the misery, the want, and the unrest of the far country he is bathed again in the peace of God which passeth understanding.

Part Six

The Beggar Who Was Rich — Chapter 16
The Leper Who Was Grateful — Chapter 17
The Pharisee Who Was Pious — Chapter 18

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham, afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Luke 16:19-25

Chapter 16

The Beggar Who Was Rich

This is one of the “Horatio Alger” stories of the Bible — *Poor Boy Makes Good*. Alger was the most popular American author during the last half of the 19th century. He wrote more than one hundred books for boys, and they all told pretty much the same story — poor boys who rose from rags-to-riches by honesty, perseverance and hard work. The Alger books came across my path when I was a boy, and I must have read sixty-five or seventy of them myself. For several years, one of my Christmas presents from my father always consisted of five or six Alger books that I had not read yet.

However, to write off the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus as simply a biblical *Ragged Dick* would be a gross misrepresentation of the truth. Some critics agree that, although this is not a “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by” story, it is an expression of what some unfortunates would like to see

happen to the fortunates. It expresses the hatred of some people who have been born on the other side of the tracks for those who have been born with the proverbial silver spoon in their mouths. However, this interpretation also does a gross injustice to the story.

The words of Abraham are the key: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:31). Man's future destiny is not determined by his wealth or his poverty, but by his attitude towards Moses and the Prophets. If Jesus had been telling this story in our world today, he would have used the word *Bible*. Moses and the Prophets were the Bible during the days of Jesus. Our destiny, then, is determined by our response to the message of the Bible.

We should look more closely at the Rich Man, at Lazarus, and we should not forget the five brothers of the Rich Man.

The Rich Man

The obituary of this man was very simple: he was rich, he was well-dressed, and he was well-fed. The Rich Man is not actually named in this story, but sometimes we give him the name *Dives*. This is not a proper name, but simply a Latin adjective for *rich* which is used in the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Bible.

After his death, the Rich Man is pictured as being immediately in hell, but apparently he can see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. In the language of the Jewish Talmud, to be in Abraham's bosom was to be in Paradise. Perhaps in addition to being able to see Lazarus in Paradise, he also had very vivid visions of his own life on earth. Sometimes, I think, he may have seen his own funeral. He had arranged for it before he died. It was to be a grand affair. And it was! But from hell his funeral looked quite different from the one he had planned:

He watched his best friend approach the grave with a piece of sod in his hand, and as he dropped it into the grave he heard him say, "He lived life for itself."

But from hell the Rich Man protests: "I didn't even know how to live. Can't you see, I am tormented in these flames?"

Then he sees the Chairman of the Community Chest approach the grave, and just before he dropped in his piece of

sod, he says, "He has created a gap that is going to be very hard to fill."

But, again, in hell the Rich Man protests: "That isn't true. I was replaced within a few days after I had died, and within a very short time my estate will be run by someone else just as well as it was run by me, perhaps even better. But, can't you see, I am tormented in these flames?"

The third man to approach the grave was the Ruler of his synagogue, and as his piece of sod dropped with a hollow sound on the casket beneath he heard him say, "He was a veritable tower of financial strength."

For the third time, the Rich Man protests: "But that was the only value I was to the synagogue. It was my money that counted, not me, and my money will very quickly be replaced by the money of others, but can't you see, I am tormented in these flames?"

The final man to approach the grave was his oldest brother. He stood silently for a few seconds and then as he dropped in the last piece of sod he said, rather sadly, "Well, my brother was certainly a great family man."

For the last time, the Rich Man in hell objects: "But you know, my family made out very well in spite of me. I was so busy with the estate that I had very little time for them, but can't you see I am tormented in this flame?"

It is very easy to see this parable is simply another story that proves that in the final analysis justice is done. The poor is rich and the rich is poor — Hallelujah!

It is important that we look through the characters in this story and see ourselves among them. In some respects all of us are rich — perhaps not in dollars and cents, but in other areas that give us an edge over other people.

I have been very rich in love. I have always lived with a family and with friends who loved me and made me feel wanted and protected. From this position, it has been very easy to look down at other people whom we refer to as *oddballs*. This is particularly true of downtown churches. I remember the old man who always sat in the front row of the right-hand side of the balcony. It was his custom to take his shoes off the moment he reached his seat, and everybody tried to stay a good distance from him because of the smell.

Then there was the huge woman who dressed like Queen Victoria. She wore very full black skirts and a bonnet tied

beneath her chin. Apparently she did have some of the traits of a queen because she was continually ordering everybody around in a very loud voice, and everybody avoided her.

Then there was the small man on the right-hand side of the ground floor who was continually saying "Amen," but he said it at the wrong times and in a very high-pitched voice. He was looked down upon by most of the congregation.

This list of people could go on, but the problem is that most of us put these *oddballs* in a category by themselves, and we try our best to avoid them. In our lives, they are like Lazarus. We leave them at the back door begging. Begging for help, for recognition, for a touch of human warmth, and for all those tokens of love they have never had. I have been rich in love and sometimes I have squandered that love.

Some are rich in opportunity. They have all the right breaks. Their parents were well-known and able to open all kinds of doors of opportunity for them. They have been rich in opportunity and they have found it very easy to look down upon others who have not had the same chances they have had. There is a Lazarus begging at the back door of their lives, and they have not helped him, in spite of their own opportunities.

Still others are rich in culture. I was reared in a home where everybody spoke good English and used good grammar. I really never had to learn grammar at school.

It was almost as much a part of me as my hands or feet. I had never heard anything else but proper grammar. If I am not careful, I find myself looking down on people who came from a background that was not rich in culture. I listen to their split infinitives and dangling participles and improper use of words and, if I am not very careful, I find myself looking down on them. They are beggars at my door, who did not come from the same wealth of culture that was mine.

How important it is that we look closely into this story and see to what extent we are like the Rich Man.

Lazarus

Lazarus was poor. He was a beggar who sat at the gate of The Rich Man's estate. He had probably chosen this location very carefully because of the people who went in and out through this gate. Even the servants could afford to give him a

little bit. He was literally poor. He owned nothing as far as material possessions were concerned.

As we have observed earlier, the majority of the Christians in the world are relatively poor, and there are some — not just a few, but many thousands — who are in exactly the same position as Lazarus as far as material wealth is concerned. I have seen them in many different countries of the world, when I have made journeys in the interest of World Relief. There are far too many. They have nothing. They are poor.

But many of us are not poor in the literal sense of the term. There are other kinds of poverty. Some are poor in intellect, and that causes no end of difficulties in their lives. Others are poor in body, and that prevents them from accomplishing the things that they want to accomplish. Still others are poor racially, and they have been forced to fight racial prejudice throughout their lives. Others are poor in society. They are outcasts of what we sometimes mistakenly call "good society," and this has been a source of harassment to them wherever they have gone.

These are the walls that separate us and leave some people almost totally excluded and feeling alone in the world. There are times when all of us feel this kind of loneliness. Sometimes it is the death of a loved one. There are situations in a war when a soldier feels totally alone. Sometimes a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a flood can sweep everything from us, and we are left alone. There are some who have committed a moral blunder that has put a circle around them and left them alone.

Lazarus was alone, but he had God. *Lazarus* is the Greek form of the name *Eleazar* which means *God is Helper*. And this is one of the major points of this story. Lazarus knew God and apparently the Rich Man did not. The Rich Man had money, but Lazarus had God. The Rich Man had houses, but Lazarus had God. The Rich Man had fine apparel, but Lazarus had God. The Rich Man ate sumptuously, but Lazarus had God. The Rich Man had friends, but Lazarus had God.

In this story, all of the assets of riches without God are put on one side of the balance and the assets of poverty with God are put on the other side. In the light of eternal values, poverty with God outweighs riches without God. Lazarus did not go to heaven because he was poor and the Rich Man did not go

to hell because he was rich. It is not poverty nor riches that make the difference. It is God.

The Five Brothers

The five brothers of the Rich Man represent us, in that they were still on the earth and they still had a chance.

When the Rich Man lifted up his eyes in hell and saw his own condition, he called Abraham and asked that Lazarus be sent over to hell with a drop of water to cool his tongue. When he discovered this was impossible, because of the great gulf separating heaven and hell, he asked that Lazarus be sent back to the earth to warn his five brothers of their peril. Abraham's answer is significant: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:31).

This passage might be paraphrased in this way: If they will not listen to the message of the Bible, then they would not be persuaded even by a dramatic miracle. People who will not accept the gospel would also explain away even the most dramatic miracle.

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1Jn. 5:11-13).

In addition to the many other things we learn from the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, at the top of the list should be the fact that the written word of God is the only solid link between God and man. If we accept the gospel as we find it in his word, we are saved. If we refuse to accept the gospel, then we are lost. This is the record!

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger, And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Luke 17:11-19

Chapter 17

The Leper Who Was Grateful

Let us imagine . . . that there was a boy named Simon who was born in the second month of the year destined to change the calendars of the entire world — from B.C., before Christ, to A.D., in the year of our Lord. Simon was fortunate enough to be born into an upper class family. He lived in a fine home in the small village of Bethgazar, located on the border between the Jewish province of Galilee and the alien territory of Samaria, which seven hundred years earlier had contained the capital city of the northern Israelite kingdom.

Like most border towns it had a mixed population. The Jewish people lived for the most part on the north side of town and the Samaritans lived on the south side. Most of the time they avoided each other, as a result of the enmity that goes back to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah in the 4th century B.C. Jesus was confronted with this when he talked to

the woman at the well: "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Jn. 4:9).

Simon's father was one of the leading men on the south side. Simon wanted for nothing. When he was just 17, he began to notice a bit of an ache in the bones of his right hand. Not long after that he began to feel the same sort of an ache in his left hand and then in his toes. Soon these aching parts of his body became numb, and the skin on those areas lost its normal colour. It became thick, glossy, and scaly. At the scaly stage, he and his family began to suspect the truth, and Simon went immediately to the local priest and was declared to be a leper. In Greek the word for *scale* is *lepos* or *lepis* from which the disease got its name. When the apostle Paul received his sight again after his conversion, the Bible says: "and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales" (Acts 9:18). The Greek word used here is *lepidas*.

The separation of the dreaded leper from the rest of society was fast and without ceremony. The priest simply told him to leave town quickly, without going home first, and that as he made his way out of town he was to cry out the dreaded anthem of the lepers, "unclean, unclean!" Simon was only 21 years of age.

Once out of town it was not long until he found the little colony of lepers who managed to survive by begging. There were 13 of them and now with Simon there were 14. Some of them were Jews and some were Samaritans. Their common bond of misery bound them together. Misery needs company. They were united by a common woe. In their tragedy they had forgotten that they were Jews and Samaritans. Simon had joined the fellowship of misery.

It did not take him very long to learn the rules. Lepers were never allowed to go into the town. They were to stay at least fifty paces away from all other people, and if anyone was to venture closer to them, they must cry out as loudly as possible, "Unclean, unclean!"

The deterioration caused by the disease was a dreadful thing to see. In the early stages, the fingers and toes would shrivel up and finally drop off. Eyebrows and eyelashes would drop out. The larynx would soon be affected so that the leper's voice was husky, hoarse, and grating. In its advanced

stages leprosy touches all the senses of healthy people: "It can be seen. To the touch it is rough and scaly. The deteriorating flesh can be smelled. And sometimes the odour is so strong that it creates an imaginary taste. Finally, it can be heard in the desperation cry, 'Unclean, unclean.'"¹

By the time Simon's leprosy reached this advanced stage he had been with the colony for nearly nine years. Simon was 30 years of age now. It was at this time that news was beginning to spread throughout the country about a new prophet in the northern province of Galilee. The new prophet was said to perform unbelievable miracles — the blind see, the lame walk, the paralyzed are activated, and the lepers are cleansed. It was not long until the news reached Simon's little colony of lepers, and they heard the name of the new prophet, Jesus.

Simon wondered if the miracle worker would ever visit the little border town of Bethgazar. It was highly unlikely, but nevertheless Simon prayed. He was careful to turn in the direction of the holy mountain of Gerizim which was considerably south of the border. It was the place where the Samaritan Temple had stood — that is, before the High Priest and Ruler of the Jewish nation, John Hyrcanus I, had destroyed it in the year 128 B.C. Simon's prayer went something like this, "Dear God, please send this miracle worker our way. Just let me see him one time. If you do, God, I'll serve you the rest of my life."

Some of the Jewish lepers in the little colony also prayed as they faced south towards the temple in Jerusalem. They prayed almost the same prayer as Simon. They made the same kind of promises: "Dear God, please send the Master. Please send Jesus to us."

By this time there were only ten of the original 14 left. Four of the original group had died during the last nine years. The remaining ten sometimes longed, even prayed, for the release of death. They envied the four who had died.

Then it happened! Jesus was heading their way. "He's coming! He's coming!" They could hardly believe it. A great many people had already passed them as they headed out of town in the hopes of meeting Jesus long before he got to the village.

The small colony of lepers had a conference. They knew the crowd would be big. It always was, everywhere Jesus went. He had a huge following. They wondered how they could get

his attention in the midst of such a large mass of people. "Our voices are bad. Some of us can't talk above a whisper. Maybe if we all called at the same time he would hear us." They even practiced, so that all ten would say exactly the same words at the same time: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." But it was a ghastly sort of chorus.

He was coming. Indeed it *was* a huge crowd of people, but it was a strangely quiet crowd. They were listening to the voice of the Master. They did not want to miss a word. The ten lepers, fifty yards away, joined the silence of the crowd and they listened.

Jesus was saying some strange things. He had a very resonant voice that could be heard clearly, even by those at the extreme edges of the crowd. The ten lepers were able to hear every word he said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Mt. 5:3,4,7,14,16,41,44).

Then the Master paused. There was total silence. The only sound was the breathing of the crowd. Simon and the other nine lepers joined the silence. Then Simon felt a bony elbow poked into his ribs and a hoarse whisper: "Now! This is our chance. When I raise my arm — just as we practiced." Then the ghastly sound of the hoarse voices of the lepers could be heard above the silence of the crowd. It was like a cry from hell: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

The crowd broke a little bit, so that, for the first time the lepers could actually see Jesus. But more important, Jesus could see them. Then they heard his voice: "Go, shew yourselves unto the priests." There was no touch of the Master's hand. There was no command, "Be thou clean," as had been the case with the leper that met him after his Sermon on the Mount: "And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Mt. 8:3). In the case of these ten lepers Jesus simply told them to go and obey the law of

Moses. They knew the rules. They had often read them in the book of Leviticus. They knew that only the priest could pronounce them clean, and only then would they be permitted to mix in the society and religious services of healthy people.

For a few seconds they did not move. Then it was Simon who broke the silence: "Well, we've got nothing to lose. Let's do what he said." His voice was still hoarse and raspy.

"It's a long way for us. Let's hurry." Now Simon's voice was no longer the voice of a leper. It was clear and vibrant. "Did you hear that? I can talk! I can talk just like other people. Look at my hand. Look at your feet. We're cleansed! We're cleansed!"

That was a "Hallelujah Chorus" that would outdo any other "Hallelujah Chorus" that would ever be sung on this earth.

After they had been walking for about fifteen minutes. Simon stopped. "I am going back to thank the Master. Let's all go. It's the least we can do."

But the other nine were reluctant, "We've got things to do. We have a lot of catching up to do with our lives. We'll thank him later."

"No. I've got to do it now!" And Simon rapidly left the others and hurried in the direction of Jesus: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" (Lk. 17:15-17).

Of course, this is a fabricated story. I have made up the name of the man as well as the village from which he came. But it is not at all inconceivable that this is the way in which it may have happened.

Ingratitude

Jesus noted and was grieved by the lack of gratitude of the other nine lepers: "Where are the nine? Where are the other Samaritans? Where are the other Jews? Were there not ten cleansed?"

In their prayers to God before Jesus had come each of the ten lepers had made promises to God. They would serve him

forever. They would give him their lives. How quickly these promises were forgotten!

Under various kinds of pressure all of us do exactly the same thing. Some of us make these kinds of promises under the pressure of severe illness. With others the promises come at a time of bereavement when we have suffered a great loss. During the Second World War there were a great many "fox-hole-commitments" made. When the bombs were falling and bullets were flying and the enemy was approaching, soldiers often promised God almost anything. We make these kinds of promises and then after God has answered our prayer we often forget them entirely. Just as he noticed and was deeply grieved by the ingratitude of the nine lepers, Jesus Christ must often be equally grieved by our ingratitude.

Sometimes we show our ingratitude by our attitude towards our own parents as they are growing older. People need more support from their mothers and fathers than almost any of the other living creatures on the earth. Most animals are on their feet and independent of their parents very shortly after birth. Even one year of dependence would be extremely long for most animals. But in the case of human beings most of us need the support of our parents for a minimum of ten years, and in many cases fifteen or twenty.

How very grateful we should be to our parents, but it is amazing how many of us begin to feel that our mothers and fathers are too much of a burden as they grow older. And sometimes we are too quick and ready to get them installed in a senior citizen's home and thus get them off our hands. In many cases our parents are far better off in this kind of home, where they will get the attention we are not able to give them, and when that time has come it is the best thing we can do for our parents. However, we need to be very careful that it is not done too soon, and just to get them off our hands. William Shakespeare expresses it well through the lips of King Lear:

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou shov'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster!
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! Away, away!

King Lear, Act I, Scene IV

Shakespeare expresses the same idea through the mouth of Amiens, one of the lords attending on Duke Senior in *As You Like It*:

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp,
As friend remember'd not.

As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII

The one leper that returned to give thanks is representative of the percentage of Christians in most churches who are grateful enough to God for their salvation that they become active in the service of the church. Some years ago in The Peoples Church in Toronto we decided to form a group that we called The Committed Company. In order to become a member of the Committed Company we asked our people to indicate by signing a card that read as follows:

THE COMMITTED COMPANY

In dependence upon God, and because The Peoples Church is my spiritual home, I hereby covenant with God that:

I will make every effort to attend The Peoples Church every Sunday morning and evening.

I will take a box of envelopes and use them to give regularly and systematically towards the support of the work.

In the public presentation of this appeal we left all sorts of loopholes as far as attendance was concerned. We recognized that people would be away on vacation and business trips, and because of illness. As far as the giving was concerned, we were very careful we did not indicate any amount. There are approximately four or five thousand people who would call The Peoples Church their spiritual home, but when we

counted the signed “Committed Company” cards we had just a few more than four hundred. That is, about ten percent of our people responded. It is exactly the same ten percent who respond to every appeal for service made in our church. Like the lepers in our Lord’s day only about ten percent of modern Christians are anxious to demonstrate their gratitude to God by serving him in some manner.

The grateful leper who did return received a bonus. All ten of them had suffered from two diseases — leprosy and ingratitude.

All ten were healed from their leprosy. The Samaritan was healed of his ingratitude: “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” From this statement of our Lord we could conclude that although the other nine were soundly healed, they were a little less than they should have been as human beings.

1. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich, Baker Book House, 1984), p.388.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Luke 18:9-14

Chapter 18

The Pharisee Who Was Pious

All of the Pharisees were not hypocrites and all of the publicans were not sincere men. The Pharisees probably had more spiritual people connected with them than did any of the other groups during our Lord's ministry. Certainly they were more spiritual than the Sadducees, who were primarily from the wealthy ruling class, and their doctrines left much to be desired. They would also be more spiritual than the Zealots, who were concerned primarily with political power and the overthrow by force of the Roman government.

Joseph of Arimathaea, who claimed the body of Jesus for burial, and Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, were both Pharisees, and it is reasonable to assume that they were basically good men. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they carried their legalism much too far, and some of them would be so concerned with keeping the minute details of the

law they would forget many much more important things, such as justice and mercy. It is this kind of pharisee Jesus is picturing in this parable about prayer.

Publicans, on the other hand, were not all as sincere as the one Jesus describes in this story. In most cases, they would be relatively wealthy men who had made their money by collecting taxes on behalf of the Roman government. In this parable, Jesus talks about a Pharisee who had gone wrong and a Publican who had gone right. Jesus uses this story to tell us about the kind of prayer that gets God's attention. It is the story of two men and two prayers with two results.

The Pharisee

It seemed this particular Pharisee wore all of his religion on the outside. He probably stood as closely to the Holy Place as he could. His bearing must have been somewhat pontifical. Even before beginning his prayer, very likely he would adjust his clothing so that it hung on him exactly as it should, and he would cast a look of disdain toward the other people in the temple, and particularly at the Publican, who was quite a distance away from him. He would assume God looked on the outside —at the shell rather than the kernel. He was about to praise himself rather than pray to God. It was as if he had absolutely no sin and no need of forgiveness. He admitted no defects or weakness that required divine aid. He had no needs for which he besought God's favour.

His prayer was a soliloquy, which is defined in the dictionary as *an act of talking to one's self*. He was not addressing God. He was having a conversation with himself. Although he looked down on the publican, he was glad he was there because he thought it made him look that much better. His first observation was that he fasted twice a week. He would have been very much aware that Mosaic law required only one day of fasting per year — the Day of Atonement, which was on the tenth day of the seventh month. By the time of Zechariah, that one day had become four days. In addition to fasting on a certain day in the seventh month, there were three additional days in the fourth, fifth, and tenth months: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy

and gladness, and cheerful feasts" (Zec. 8:19).

During the days of Jesus, the extremely religious people had increased the number of fasting days even more. They fasted twice a week — on Thursdays and Mondays. There was a tradition that these were the days Moses ascended and descended from the mountain where he had received the Ten Commandments. The Pharisee in this parable was greatly impressed with his own piety as far as fasting was concerned.

The second observation in the Pharisee's soliloquy was that he tithed much more than the law required. There was a tithe required on corn, wine, oil and cattle, but many of the Pharisees had added such things as mint, anise, and cumin. These were all extremely small things that a very pious Pharisee might take a long time to carefully count out, even though the law did not require it. There was absolutely nothing wrong with giving more tithe than was required, but very often this particular kind of Pharisee would give it in place of much more important things, such as justice, mercy, and faith.

For the most part, the Pharisee's comments about his own piety were quite right. He was speaking the truth, but he was comparing himself with other people: "I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Lk. 18:11). When we are standing before God, that is not the question. The important consideration is: How do I compare with God?

The Publican

"And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13).

All Publicans would be relatively well off financially. This man in our Lord's parable was probably not as wealthy as Zacchaeus, who is the subject of the next chapter. Apparently Zacchaeus had a large contract with the Roman government to collect taxes, and he probably employed other people to do some of it on his behalf. Both the man in the parable and Zacchaeus were in a business in which it was very tempting to become involved in malpractice. When Zacchaeus met Jesus, he admitted to his malpractice: "If I have taken any thing

from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Lk. 19:8).

Because of this, all publicans had a bad reputation. Even in the New Testament the name *Publican* is often associated with bad people — "Publicans and sinners," "heathen man and a Publican," and "the Publicans and the harlots" (Mt. 9:10, 18:17, 21:31). Publicans in general were considered ceremonially unclean because they associated a great deal with the unclean Roman gentiles for whom they worked.

However, the Publican in our Lord's parable was quite different from most of his associates. He had come to a time in his life when he was deeply convicted of his own sin. In his prayer he does not simply say "God be merciful to me a sinner." Rather, he refers to himself as "the sinner" — *Ato Amartoto* in the Greek. This could be translated "sinner that I am." It reminds us of the testimony of the apostle Paul when he wrote to Timothy: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1Tim. 1:15).

Conclusion

Our Lord does not take many words to draw the obvious conclusion to his story: "I tell you, this man (the Publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other (the Pharisee): for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 18:14).

Both Old and New Testaments emphasize that God will not tolerate the proud and he honours the humble. The psalmist emphasized it: "Though the Lord be nigh, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off" (Ps. 138:6).

Solomon said it a little differently: "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. 29:23).

As he looks forward prophetically to the day of the Lord, Isaiah declares: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isa. 2:10-12).

This principle is basic in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3).

It is repeated again by Mary in the *Magnificat*: “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree” (Lk. 1:52).

James put it beautifully: “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (Jas. 4:6,10).

As a result of his experience in denying Jesus, the apostle Peter knew what he was talking about when he said: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1Pet. 5:6).

It is little wonder that Jesus sets the halo over the head of the Publican: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other” (Lk. 18:14).

Part Seven

The Problem of Wealth — Chapter 19

The Question of Taxes — Chapter 20

The Threat of Tribulation — Chapter 21

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho, And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and came down; for to day I must abide at thy home. And he made haste, and came down; and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:1-10

Chapter 19

The Problem of Wealth

Zacchaeus lived in a magnificent home in Florida — that is the *Florida* of Palestine. The city of Jericho and its surrounding countryside was like Paradise compared to most of the rest of the Holy Land. Its balsam trees produced a balm that gave off a unique fragrance and was thought to have healing properties. It was known throughout the ancient world as the Balm of Gilead.

Sometimes Jericho was called the “City of Palms.” Josephus referred to it as “a divine region and the fattest in Palestine.” Herod the Great and his son, Archelaus, had erected some beautiful buildings in Jericho that included their own winter palace, a magnificent theatre and a hippodrome for chariot races and games. Mark Antony gave the city to Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, as a token of his great affection for her.

It was located 15 miles west and slightly north of Jerusalem. The road between Jerusalem and Jericho ran downhill most of the way and was extremely rugged and rocky, making it a good place for thieves to assault travellers — particularly those who were foolish enough to travel alone, as was the case in the story of the good Samaritan.

Zacchaeus was an extremely wealthy man, probably one of the very few rich people with whom Jesus dealt. He was a Publican. As we noted in the story of the Pharisee and Publican Praying in the Temple, a Publican collected taxes on behalf of the Roman government. Luke says that Zacchaeus “was the chief among the Publicans.” He was probably in charge of collecting taxes for all of the territory surrounding Jericho, and it is quite likely he had lesser Publicans working for him. Jericho was one of the three main centres for taxation in those days. The other two were Caesarea and Capernaum. It was also the centre of an important trade route network. All of these things contributed towards making Zacchaeus a very rich man.

Jesus was still on his way to Jerusalem — a journey that had started back when Luke says, “he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51), and as he made his way from the east side of Jericho to the west he was within just a few days of the cross. If we were to choose one verse from this story and use it as a text, it would have to be verse five: “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house” (Lk. 19:5).

The Divine Imperative

The first time Jesus used the word *must* in connection with his work is recorded only by Luke: “And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Lk. 2:49). Perhaps when he said this Jesus was thinking about a conference that had been held to plan the incarnation. There may have been a meeting of the Board of Managers in heaven. All three members of the Board were present on that occasion — God the Father who was the First Vice-President, Jesus Christ who was the Second Vice-President and the Holy Spirit who was the Third Vice-President. The Presidency was in all three names. At this

meeting it was decided that when the Son went down to the earth he *must* do certain things. It was this divine imperative Jesus was thinking about when he gave his mother this answer in the temple in Jerusalem: “I *must* be about my father’s business.”

One aspect of that business was that he had to fulfill the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures: “For I say unto you, that this that is written *must* yet be accomplished in me” (Lk. 22:37). The loose ends of prophecy had to be brought together. That task was to be started during his first advent and it would be finalized when he came back to earth for the second time.

Another of our Lord’s divine imperatives was that he was to preach the gospel to his own people, the Jews: “And he said unto them, I *must* preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Lk. 4:43-44). There is a sense in which his primary purpose was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the Jewish people.

However there were other individuals who were also on his list of imperatives. One of these was the woman he met at the well in Samaria. That meeting was introduced by these words: “He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must* needs go through Samaria” (Jn. 4:3-4).

It was also of the utmost importance that the people of the Gentile world were reached with his message: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I *must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Jn. 10:16).

The major divine imperative that our Lord recognized was his own death, burial, and resurrection: “From that time forth, began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day” (Mt. 16:21).

If we were to put these all together our Lord’s divine imperatives would look something like this: I must be about my Father’s business. I must fulfill the Scriptures. I must preach the gospel to my own people. I must preach the gospel in Samaria. I must also reach the Gentile world. I must die; I must be buried; I must rise again. Included in these *musts* was his visit with Zacchaeus in the city of Jericho: “For today

I must abide at thy house."

Zacchaeus wanted very much to see Jesus and to learn something about him but he had four major problems. His first problem was the huge crowd. There are some people who will allow a large crowd to prevent them from doing something. However there are very few people that will allow a crowd to prevent them from doing something that they really want to do. In the city of Toronto where I live, every weekend during the summer there are thousands of people who join the impossible crowds on the highways in order to drive north to their cottages and cabins in the Lake District of Ontario. They are willing to join the bumper to bumper traffic on Friday night, which lasts for most of the journey, and then once again on Sunday night to get back to Toronto.

There are others who will face the same kind of traffic problem every day in order to go downtown to work and back again, but then they will turn around and go right back downtown for a football or hockey game or some sort of a concert. Zacchaeus would have been one of those people who refused to allow a crowd to stop him. His second problem was his stature. He was a short man. Small people very often face problems in this world that tall people do not have. I happen to be one of the small people of the world. I am only five feet, eight inches tall and I have never weighed more than one hundred and fifty pounds. Most of my life I have weighed considerably less than this. I have discovered that it is often very easy for people to overlook small people. A small person has to work twice as hard to be noticed as a person whose stature is big. Zacchaeus was one of us little people but he did not let that problem stop him.

His third problem was his job. Most of the other Jewish people considered him to be a traitor because he worked for the Roman government and he was considered ceremonially unclean. No good rabbi would allow himself to be seen mingling on a regular basis with a Publican. Because of this the people in that big crowd would have done anything to prevent Zacchaeus from standing in front of them in order to see Jesus. But once again Zacchaeus did not let this stop him. He pushed his way through a crowd that was hostile to him and climbed up into a sycamore tree where he would have a good view. Fortunately for him most sycamore trees have some branches that grow out of the trunk relatively close to

the ground.

His final problem was that he was rich. It is interesting to speculate on the epitaphs that might have been inscribed on the burial places of some of the people in the Bible. *And he was rich* was about all that could have been said about the man who went to hell (Lk. 16). *And he was blind* would have been sufficient to have identified Bartimaeus of Jericho (Mk. 10). *And he was a beggar* would adequately have marked the grave of Lazarus who went to Paradise (Lk. 16). *And he was a leper* would have been all that was necessary to have marked the grave of Naaman who was captain of the host of the King of Syria (2Kngs. 5). *And he was a Samaritan* was the way Jesus pointed out the leper who returned to give thanks.

If we were attempting to write an epitaph for Zacchaeus before he came in contact with Jesus Christ a suitable one might have been *and he was wealthy*. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with riches but the problem is that when we have a great deal of material wealth, in many cases, we do not think we have any need for God. It has been my privilege to visit in more than eighty different countries in this world, and almost without exception I have observed that if the people in a country are extremely poor they respond to the message of the gospel. If they are wealthy they do not respond. Of course there are exceptions to this but in general it is true. My country, the Dominion of Canada, is considered to be among the affluent countries of the modern world, and one of the results of our affluence is an indifference to the message of our churches from coast to coast. Almost everything we do in our churches must be done on a Sunday, or at least during the weekend. It is getting increasingly difficult to persuade our people to come to church for any reason during the days or nights of the week. For many of the "faithful" even Sunday night attendance at the house of God is rare.

Zacchaeus had many barriers that stood between him and Jesus — the crowd, his stature, his job, and his wealth —but he overcame every one of them, and Jesus Christ went to his home on that memorable day. We do not know whether he stayed there for a single meal or even overnight. The Bible does not say. But regardless of the length of the visit, Zacchaeus was gloriously saved and so was his household.

We need to be careful we do not make the mistake of thinking "household salvation" was an automatic thing in the

Bible. In most cases where a man and his household were saved, a careful reading will indicate that each of these people, as individuals, had to respond to God, including the head of the house. Abraham was promised a great many things by God and they were promised to him and his seed, but even then the promise was dependent upon each individual obeying God: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee . . . And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations" (Gen. 17:7,9).

The Psalmist made this very clear: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." This appears to be automatic salvation for the family, but the next verse clarifies that point: "To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17-18).

We do not practise infant baptism in The Peoples Church, but we do hold a service in which parents have an opportunity to commit their babies to God. In this *dedication* service we are always very careful to address the parents and make absolutely certain they understand that this service of *dedication* does not automatically put their children into the family of God or that as a result of this service their babies are automatically saved. We attempt to make it very clear that this service has more to do with the dedication of the parents than it does with the salvation of the child. What they are doing is declaring publicly before God, that to the best of their ability, they will rear their baby in such a way that he will be exposed to the gospel and that they will pray he will accept Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour.

When Zacchaeus and his family came into contact with Jesus Christ they were saved, and Zacchaeus gave immediate evidence of what had happened by his great profession: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Lk. 19:8). This same principle of the Christian faith was emphasized by the apostle Paul a number of years later when he wrote to the church at Ephesus: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour,

working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).

Conclusion

The meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus was planned in the *Board Room* in heaven before Jesus came into this world, but as is the case with our salvation, God has given us a choice. For some reason we cannot completely understand, we are permitted by God to accept Jesus Christ or to reject him. In all probability that was also true in the case of Zacchaeus. This may have been the one and only time when Zacchaeus would have had a chance to meet Jesus. He could have let the obstacles stand in his way — the crowd, his stature, his job or his wealth. If he had missed this moment it might never had been repeated. The American poet says it well:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the
 bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the
 right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that
 light.

James Russell Lowell (1819-1891)

And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.

Luke 20:20-26

Chapter 20

The Question Of Taxes

We would have known very little about the Herodians if they had not been mentioned three times in the gospels (Mt. 22:16, Mk. 3:6 and Mk. 12:13). This story in Luke is about the Herodians but they are not actually named. They were political rather than religious and they supported the dynasty of King Herod. Under normal circumstances the Herodians and the Pharisees would have been bitter enemies, but they united their efforts against Jesus because they both considered him to be their foe. They thought they would be able to disarm Jesus by paying him a compliment: "Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly" (Lk. 20:21). Then they followed with the question they thought would trap Jesus: "Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?" (Lk. 20:22).

At first Jesus made it very clear to them he knew exactly what they were up to: "But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me?" (Lk. 20:23). Then he asked them to give him a penny. The penny they gave him was called a *denarius*. The first letter of that word has travelled through the centuries to us and in the British countries of the world the sign for the penny is still the letter *D*. It was a silver coin minted by the Roman government, probably in the city of Rome. On the obverse side of the coin would be the image of Tiberius, the current Emperor of Rome. On the reverse side there may have been a picture of his mother, Livia, seated on a throne with branch and sceptre in hand.

When Jesus asked them whose image and name was engraved on the coin they answered without hesitation that it was Caesar's. His question was unexpected. They had expected Jesus would tell them they should pay their taxes to the Roman government or they should not pay them. If he had said the former, then he would have been in trouble with the Jewish people, because they strongly resisted paying anything at all directly to the Roman government which had conquered them. If he had answered the latter, he would have been in immediate trouble with the Roman officials.

These men, the Pharisees and the Herodians, must have been completely nonplussed when Jesus said: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Lk. 20:25).

God and Caesar — Not Incompatible

Jesus was stating a Biblical principle: If we live in a country we are obliged to obey the laws of that country — including the taxation laws. The Roman Empire had built a network of roads throughout most of the civilized world the like of which had never been seen before. They had provided police protection and military protection. As a matter of fact the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus was enjoying a peace that has seldom been seen either before or since. Historians referred to this period as the *Pax Romana*. It commenced in about 27 B.C. and lasted until about 180 A.D. Jesus was simply telling these people they should obey the Roman laws and pay the Roman taxes.

The apostle Paul emphasized exactly the same thing: "Let

every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:1-2).

It is important we do not leave this principle in the first century. It applies equally to our century. When we resist the state we are resisting God. When we obey the laws of the state we are doing so because our officials have been ordained by God. King David was very much aware that God had chosen him and his son to be the second two kings of Israel: "Among the sons of my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel" (1Chr. 28:4-5).

King Solomon himself reiterated this even more strongly in the message God gave him. "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth" (Prov. 8:15-16).

Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon between 605 and 562 B.C., was a completely pagan king. When he was still the Crown Prince Nebuchadnezzar conquered Syria and Palestine and took hostages from Judaea. One of those hostages was Daniel. In the seventh year of his reign he attacked Jerusalem again and captured it. On March 16, 597 B.C., he deposed the king, Jehoiachin, and appointed his own king, Mattaniah-Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah and the king of Babylon demanded a large tribute which was paid directly to Babylon. Ten years later he sacked Jerusalem again and sent a fourth group of Judaeans back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the temples of Marduk, the chief god of the city of Babylon and also built a number of other pagan temples and shrines.

Despite all of this harassment of the Jewish people God commanded them to obey this pagan king: "And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the

yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand" (Jer. 27: 6-8).

Although these rulers are appointed in a sense by God, the Bible also makes it clear that God maintains his control over them.

Daniel explained this to Belshazzar when he was summoned to interpret the writing the king had seen on the wall: "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour . . . But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him . . . And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewst all this . . . This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:18, 20, 22, 26-28).

Even though it was Pontius Pilate, the fifth Procurator of Judaea, who finally authorized the crucifixion, Jesus stated that Pilate owed his authority to God: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it was given thee from above" (Jn. 19:11).

By their use of Rome's coins these Herodians and Pharisees were admitting Rome's authority over them. They would have been familiar with the saying, "He whose coin is current is king of the land." If you use Caesar's coins then pay Caesar's taxes.

At this point someone might object, and ask a second question: "What if the state's demands conflict with God's demands?" The answer to this question was given on one occasion after the apostles had been arrested for preaching the gospel and were brought before the high priest and the council: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Where there is a real conflict between the state and God there is no question whatsoever. God always comes first.

Among the 102 passengers that sailed to the New World on board the Mayflower, at least 35 of them were extremely religious people who had left their homes in the old world so

they would be free to worship God as they chose. At that time the laws in England prevented them from doing so. The Pilgrim Fathers were obeying God rather than man.

Another example of the same kind of thing is in the life story of Brother Andrew. The book that tells his story was titled *God's Smuggler*. At a time when the laws of the countries in Eastern Europe prohibited the import of Bibles, Brother Andrew felt that he should obey God rather than man and so he proceeded to smuggle Bibles into those communistic countries.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter we noted that the Herodians and Pharisees were able to forget their differences and unite against a common foe. Perhaps we should learn a lesson from this in our Christian work. There are a great many different Christian denominations and groups in the modern world. All of us do not agree entirely with each other. However, if we are Evangelicals then there are certain major issues on which we are all in hearty agreement. Sometimes it is necessary for us to forget the things that divide us and get together on the main issues in order to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly we are, and should be, very much convicted about our own beliefs, but we need to make room for those who hold some other position — that is, hold firm on the major doctrines but temporarily put the minor issues to one side. A good example of this can be seen in the co-operation among churches in a Billy Graham Crusade. Basically, in a Graham Crusade we unite around the gospel and the command of our Lord to preach it throughout the entire world: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). This command is equally true for the Calvinists and the Arminians, the Charismatics and the Plymouth Brethren, the Episcopalians and the Salvationists or any other group of Christians who have been born again by the power of God and are anxious to see souls won to Christ both at home and abroad.

And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Luke 21:29-33

Chapter 21

The Threat of Tribulation

The message of the Bible combines absolute despair and glorious hope. The Bible never makes any attempt to put a blanket over the difficulties we face in life, but it does lift up a lantern of hope at the end of this dark passage. All three of the synoptic gospels give an account of what we have chosen to call our Lord's Olivet Discourse, in which Jesus gave the basic principles of his prophetic teaching (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; and Lk. 21).

As often is the case there are minor differences between the presentations of each of the gospel writers, but there are two facts that stand out, and they are repeated by all three of the writers: 1) There is a devastating period of tribulation in the days that lie ahead for the people of this world, and 2) Jesus Christ will come back again to this earth with great power and in great glory.

Luke expresses the tribulation that will come upon the earth in these words: "Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Lk. 21:10-12). Luke continues to describe this period of great distress, as do each of the other writers, but it should be noted that there are definitely people of God in the world at the time this takes place. They do not escape the persecution of the Antichrist.

Luke expresses the glorious return of Christ with these words: "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Lk. 21:27). Matthew and Mark say virtually the same things, both about the period of tribulation and the second coming, with a few variations.

Perhaps we should remember that the events recorded in this chapter as well as those in the previous chapter probably occurred on the Tuesday after his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. That had taken place just two days before, the day we now call Sunday. He likely returned to Bethany and rested quietly on Wednesday and for most of Thursday, and then returned to Jerusalem in time for the Passover, which he and his disciples celebrated on Thursday evening.

On this Tuesday they had been in the temple where Jesus had noticed the people putting their money into the treasury, particularly the widow who put in her two mites. Then as Jesus and the disciples commented on the beauty of the temple and, in particular, he was amazed at the stones — probably the enormous size of the stones. In Mark's gospel his words were: "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are here!" (Mk.13:1). In our modern world very likely the disciple would have said, "Wow! What stones these are!" (For a detailed description of the Jewish temple see *Jesus, by Mark*, Chapter 13.)

When Jesus told the disciples it would not be long before the temple would be destroyed, they were puzzled, and after they arrived at the Mount of Olives they came to him privately and asked two questions, which are very clearly stated in Matthew's account: "Tell us, when shall these things

be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Mt.24:3).

It was in the course of his answer to these questions that Jesus told the parable of the fig tree, which is also related in all three gospels. Some commentators believe that the "fig tree" stands for the Jewish nation. It is only Luke who adds "and all the trees." If the "fig tree" represents Israel, then "all the trees" would represent all the other nations of the world, and it may be that this interpretation of our Lord's parable is quite true. When the sap starts to flow in any tree we know it will not be very long before we will see buds on that tree. Then we know that winter is over and summer is coming. When we see some of the events Jesus described coming to pass, then we can be assured that his return is not very far off.

He urged the disciples to be watchful, and then he added: "This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:32). The dictionary defines a generation as the average period between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring —or about thirty years, forty years at the most. This prophetic statement of our Lord's can be interpreted in several different ways. He may have meant that there may still be a generation of Jewish people in the world, both at the time of the destruction of the temple, as well as the time of his second coming. Or he may have meant that there will be a company of believers in the world, when the temple is destroyed and when he returns. Or he may have meant that the generation who see the beginning of these events would still be alive at the end of them. Each of these interpretations could be true, both of the destruction of the temple and of the second coming.

Look At The World

There could be no doubt in anyone's mind that in this parable Jesus was saying things in the world are going to get worse before they get better. There is a time of winter when there are no buds on the fig tree or on any other tree. He has just finished describing this dreadful time in the same Discourse in which he gives this parable. It is very difficult to understand how anyone can hold a postmillennial position about the second coming of Jesus Christ when there are chapters like these in the Bible. It might be nice to think man

will create a society that will eventually become good enough so Christ can return to the Kingdom of this World which has been created by man. However, this chapter, and many others, would indicate that man will only be successful in creating a society that degenerates rapidly until its only hope is the return of Christ:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived (2Tim. 3:12-13).

And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Lk. 18:7-8)

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Mt. 24:9-13).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (1Tim. 4:1).

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation (2Pet. 3:3-4).

If the world is bound to degenerate as time goes on, should we waste our energy in making attempts to clean it up? I think the answer to that question is an emphatic, Yes! Whenever Christians can do anything to participate in activities that will slow down the progress of evil we should do everything within

our power to help. Certainly, we should fight against pornography and abortion and communism. However, we need to be very careful that we do not allow any of these campaigns against evil to become our gospel. In our church in Toronto we could have our people sign a petition against something at least one Sunday out of every month. There seems to be no end of such petitions, and I have to be careful I do not allow my people to become so involved in this kind of thing they forget that our real task is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of a world filled with evil, and in which there will be even more evil in the days that lie ahead.

Although we do everything possible to eliminate some of the problems in the world, we need to remember that the ship of world civilization is going to sink. Our major task is to rescue as many people as possible before it goes down.

We need to look at the world through the eyes of the Bible. We need to remember constantly that God's final purpose for the history of mankind is not despair, but hope. We must keep our eyes on the fig tree. Summer is coming.

Look At Ourselves

As the senior pastor of a major church I come into contact with a great many people who tell me that it is wintertime in their lives: My world is dead. My life is useless. It is useless, barren, discouraging, frustrating, meaningless, difficult, hopeless and empty. This is what Jacob must have felt like when he said: "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36).

At this time Jacob was living in Hebron which was located about twenty miles south and slightly east of Jerusalem. Joseph had been sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers years ago, and he was lost to Jacob. Because of the famine his sons had been forced to go to Egypt and ask for help, but his youngest son, Benjamin, had stayed with him. When the other sons returned from Egypt Jacob discovered to his dismay that Simeon had been forced to stay in Egypt with Joseph, and that he was going to have to allow Benjamin to go back to Egypt, before Simeon would be free. As Jacob looked

at himself, certainly he could say, "All these things are against me."

There was a time at which Job felt it would be better for him if he were to die: "When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not" (Job 7:4-8).

Both Jacob and Job had forgotten that the summer was coming. Jacob was reunited with his sons, he lived to be 130 years of age and became the father of the Jewish people. Job recovered his health and at the end of his life he possessed twice as much as he had ever had before: "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

All of us have a tendency to look at ourselves when we are going through difficulty and to forget that summer is coming. Sometimes we are like Peter when he attempted to walk on the water, and then started to sink, and cried out for help: "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Mt. 14:31).

How often we despair as we begin to go down in a sea of temptation, and we forget: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:13).

We forget that God has a purpose in our difficulties: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Cor. 4:17).

Sometimes the summer comes while we are still alive in this life, but for certain it will come permanently when Jesus returns and takes us to be with him: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and

hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (Jas: 5:7).

Conclusion

In the light of the devastation that Jesus told his disciples is bound to come upon the earth, and also in the light of the fact that he is going to return to the earth, we should very carefully examine ourselves, examine the world, and examine our relationship with God.

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Lk. 21:34). In the light of the parable of the fig tree we need to examine ourselves. Take heed in the winter because summer is coming.

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:36). We need to examine the world in which we live and be aware of the fact that in the final analysis it is not going to get better, but rather it is going to get worse. We must examine the world and know the world.

Finally we need to examine our relationship with God. This we do in our prayer life. We need to make sure we are in constant communion with God — “pray always.”

Part Eight

Good People Fall — Chapter 22

Bad People Repent — Chapter 23

Sad People Rejoice — Chapter 24

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid, beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him, and he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

Luke 22:54-60

Chapter 22

Good People Fall

"Doctrinally, the Pope is regarded as the successor of St. Peter, who was head of the Apostles." This is the way the Encyclopedia Britannica defines the word *pope*. And of course, this is the way the Roman Catholic church would define its use of the word *pope*. It is not difficult to see how this definition would come about.

The New Testament never states that Peter was the chief apostle. However, we have seen him on several occasions as one of the three who always seemed to be on the inside circle of the disciples. The other two were James and John. In addition to this Peter is described as doing some things none of the other disciples did. We have noted those occasions in an earlier chapter. We should remember: he was the only one who made an attempt to walk on the water, he was also the only one who drew his sword when Jesus was about to be

arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and he was one of the two disciples that followed Jesus to the high priest's house. The apostle Peter's denial of his Master at this time is one of the very limited number of stories related by all four of the gospel writers (Mt. 26, Mk. 14 and Jn. 18).

At that time the high priest was Caiaphas, who was the son-in-law of Annas, who had been the high priest but had been dethroned by the Romans. However, it was to Annas that Jesus was taken first after his arrest. Although he was no longer the high priest, Annas still had a great deal of influence among the Jewish people. In all probability Caiaphas and Annas lived in the same place. It would have been a series of buildings in the form of a courtyard. There would have been a gate in the central section which was probably open to the sky, and this is where the fire would have been by which Peter warmed himself. This story about Peter's denial of his Lord is probably the best illustration that can be found to support the advice that the apostle Paul was later to give to the church at Corinth: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Cor. 10:12). We should consider Peter's remarkable profession, his pitiful denial and his bitter remembrance.

A Remarkable Profession

Peter's remarkable profession of faith needs to be set within the conversation that he had with Jesus during the Last Supper, which had taken place only a few hours earlier: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:31-32). Peter must have been very disturbed when he heard his Master's words and he protested very quickly. If he had been reclining at the table, I think he must have stood to his feet as he said: "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Lk. 22:33).

Jesus answered in a way that must have disturbed Peter even more: "Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Lk. 22:34).

After the arrest of Jesus the disciples dispersed. We do not know where they went, but it is likely they feared they might

be arrested along with Jesus. Only Peter and one other disciple followed Jesus to the home of the High Priest. We are not told the name of this other disciple but most of the commentators think that in all probability it was John. John's father, Zebedee, was in the fishing business in Galilee. It is very likely it was a large business, perhaps having a branch in Jerusalem. Mark tells us John's father had "hired servants" who were associated with him in his business (Mk. 1:20).

In those days it was impossible to keep fresh fish for any length of time, so the commercial side of the fishing business involved salt fish. Perhaps John's father sent salt fish to Jerusalem, and from his branch there, it was delivered to the home of the High Priests. It might even be that John himself had delivered it on some occasions. At any rate John was allowed to go through the gate and into the house because the High Priest knew him. John must have identified himself, and then went back out and brought Peter in as well. It is unlikely Peter went right into the house. He was content to stay with the servants and soldiers by the fire and warm himself in the courtyard. He may have been close enough to see and hear what was going on, but it could well be that he could neither see his Master nor hear the "trial" of Jesus by the High Priest.

His Pitiful Denial

It was probably a slave girl who was the doorkeeper and was the first to ask Peter about his relationship with Jesus: "But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, this man was also with him" (Lk. 22:56). The girl actually *stared* at Peter for perhaps a few seconds before she accused him. Peter's immediate answer, almost without thinking, was "Woman, I know him not."

Peter's second confrontation as he sat by the fire was with a man who looked at Peter and said, "Thou art also of them."

About an hour went by before Peter was accused again, probably by another woman, who recognized that Peter was from Galilee: "For thy speech betrayeth thee." Apparently she recognized his Galilean accent in the same way that people living in the northern part of the United States can recognize the accent of people who come from the south, just as

southerners can recognize the accent of a New Yorker. One of the men who confronted Peter was a relative of the servant of the High Priest whose ear Peter had cut off. It was at this point that Peter began to curse and swear. Perhaps his response in this case was something like: "I'll be damned if I know him!"

Then Peter heard the cock crowing: "And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Mt. 26:75).

A Bitter Memory

"And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." Perhaps this took place when Jesus was being moved from Annas to Caiaphas. The eyes of Jesus and Peter were locked together for a few seconds. Jesus looked at Peter, but it was not a look of condemnation but of pardon and of grace and of love. It was a look that said: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

It was a look that said: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

It was a look that said: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

It was a look that said: "But if we walk in the light, as he is the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jn. 1:7).

It was a look that Peter must have remembered when he wrote: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1Pet. 5:10-11).

It was the same kind of look Peter had seen on many occasions as Jesus mingled among the people — merciful,

pitiful, patient, gentle, and compassionate: “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Mt. 9:36).

It was the same kind of look Peter had seen on the face of his Master when he met the widow coming out of the city of Nain: “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not” (Lk. 7:13).

The cock crowed, Jesus looked, and Peter went out and wept. Peter wept because he realized what he had done. But the tears shed came from the heart of a man who knew that it was going to be all right. He had been forgiven. Jesus still cared about him. Peter’s tears were washing away the dreadful burden of guilt he felt. It was going to be all right.

And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left . . . And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justify; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Luke 23:32-33, 39-43

Chapter 23

Bad People Repent

Crucifixion was one of the most ghastly methods of capital punishment ever devised by man. It was used by the Persians, the Seleucids, the Carthaginians, the Romans, and the Jews. It was practiced for more than one thousand years, from about 600 B.C. to A.D. 337 when it was abolished by Constantine. It is difficult to believe that the same one thousand year period also produced some of the greatest philosophers, poets and rulers who have ever lived. The list, almost endless, should include at least Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Socrates, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar.

Chester W. New, who was my professor of History at McMaster University, together with Charles E. Phillips of the University of Toronto, wrote a book titled *Ancient and Medieval History*, in which Phillips comments on the empire that was brought into being by Julius and Augustus Caesar:

"If by some miracle the past were to be lived again and you were permitted to select any period except the present for your appearance on the earth, the first two centuries A.D. would be a safe choice. There was a reign of law and order more complete and lasting, probably, than at any period before or since."¹ But this same civilization crucified thousands of people. Before the actual crucifixion took place the victim was whipped or scourged with a *flagellum*, a whip made of leather thongs with small pieces of metal or bone attached in such a way that they would tear the victim's flesh. After this the criminal was forced to carry the horizontal cross beam of his cross to the place of execution. Usually someone walked in front of him carrying a sign stating the crime of which he was guilty. This sign would be nailed over his head after he was on the cross. In the case of Jesus the sign read "This is the King of the Jews" and it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

When the procession reached the execution site, the man would be stripped of his clothing and bound to the horizontal beam that he had been carrying or, as was the case with Jesus, nailed to it through the wrists. The vertical beam of the cross was usually already in place. The victim would be raised nine or ten feet from the ground and the horizontal beam would be attached to the vertical beam so that the doomed man's feet were about a foot or so off the ground. There was a horn-like projection that he straddled which supported most of his weight and prevented the nails from tearing through his hands. Finally, the feet were tied or nailed to the vertical beam.

I have in my possession a Roman nail made by hand at about the same time Jesus was crucified. It was excavated from a Roman fortress near Perth in Scotland. There were 875 thousand of these nails uncovered: they had been buried beneath a Roman fortress built in A.D. 83 and evacuated in A.D. 87. The nail is seven and one quarter inches in length. The head is nearly half an inch wide, and the main body of the nail is square rather than round. It comes very gradually to a sharp point. This was very likely the sort of nail used to hold Jesus on the cross. These nails were found in the 1960's by the British Archaeologists, Professor I.A. Richmond of Oxford and Dr. Saint Joseph of Cambridge.

Death by crucifixion was usually caused by exhaustion or heart failure. Sometimes it was hastened by shattering the

victim's legs with an iron club. The average time it took for a man to die was thirty-six hours. However, there were some who hung in agony for as long as nine days.

There were thousands of crucifixions. In 519 B.C. Darrius I, the King of Persia, crucified three thousand political opponents in Babylon. In 88 B.C. Alexander Jannaeus, the Judaean King and High Priest, crucified eight hundred Pharisaic opponents. In 4 B.C. the Roman General Varus inflicted persecution on two thousand rebels. In A.D. 66 The Roman Procurator of Judaea, Florus, crucified three thousand six hundred Jews. In A.D. 70 during the seige of Jerusalem by Titus, there were so many crucifixions they ran out of wood for the crosses and places to put them up.

Despite the fact that there were thousands of crucifixions the only ones that are well-known are Jesus' and the two thieves who hung on either side of him. The Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus gives the names of these malefactors as Dysmas and Gysmas.

Jesus, Dysmas and Gysmas

Let us suppose that . . . there were three boys, Gysmas, Dysmas and Jesus who grew up in the southern part of the Province of Galilee in the town of Nazareth. Nazareth was located seventeen or eighteen miles east of the sea of Galilee and twenty or twenty-one miles west of the Mediterranean Sea. The city of Jerusalem was about seventy miles south. Dysmas and Gysmas lived in Nazareth until they were teenagers. Before they were twenty they managed to get into the wrong crowd and gradually became criminals. By the time they were thirty they had moved out of Nazareth and made their headquarters in Jerusalem. They had become hardened criminals.

Jesus, on the other hand, stayed in Nazareth for nearly thirty years. At about that time he walked seventy miles south to John the Baptist who was baptizing people in the Jordan River. John was doing his work about twenty miles east of Jerusalem — maybe on the other side of the Jordan in Peraea. This is where Jesus submitted to the baptism of John and his ministry was inaugurated.

Dysmas and Gysmas worked their criminal trade in the city of Jerusalem, but very often they would find victims out

on the road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho, particularly people who were foolish enough to attempt that dangerous journey by themselves. One day they attacked a man who was walking down this road alone. They took everything he had including his clothes. They wounded him severely and left him half dead. Then they took off and hid in a place where they could watch to see if he actually died. But for the help of a Samaritan, who came along and helped him just at the right time, he would have died. The Samaritan dressed his wounds, and then carried him to safety on his own donkey, and left him at a small inn.

Crime was their daily routine, but they soon discovered it was almost impossible to work this area without coming into contact with a new Teacher who was being followed everywhere he went by hundreds of people. On one occasion they were able to get close enough to the new Teacher to see him. It was Jesus, the boy with whom they had grown up in Nazareth. They pushed in close enough to hear what he was saying. To their amazement he was telling the story of the man they had nearly killed on the road to Jericho. They looked at one another in amazement: "How did he know about that?"

Then they heard some of the things he was saying: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works . . . Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel . . . When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Mt. 16:27, 19:28, 25:31).

When they heard Jesus saying these things many thoughts went through the minds of Dysmas and Gysmas: Who does he think he is? We knew him when he was a boy. Even then he was rather strange. Almost every time we asked him to go anywhere, he would say: "No, I can't. I've got some things to do for my Father." And at that time his father, his name was Joseph, had been dead more than five years.

Let's imagine that Dysmas and Gysmas were in fact boyhood friends of Jesus, and they were the thieves nailed to crosses on either side of Jesus at the time of their crucifixions.

The crucifixion site was called "the skull." This word in the

Latin language is *calvarium* from which we transliterate our word *Calvary*. It was probably about nine o'clock in the morning when these three were nailed to their separate crosses. Jesus was in the middle, Dysmas was on his left and Gysmas was on his right.

The two malefactors joined with the crowd around the crosses as they all jeered at Jesus: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself" (Lk. 23:35-37).

And Dysmas added his voice to the crowd: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us" (Lk. 23:39).

Then as Dysmas watched Jesus and noticed how calm he was despite his suffering he began to have second thoughts. He heard the voice of Jesus. He was praying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Then Dysmas looked across the body of Jesus and rebuked his friend, "We got what was coming to us. This man is innocent. He has done nothing wrong. He hasn't broken any laws. Don't you even fear God? We are both about to meet him." Then he looked at Jesus and said: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:42-43). As he said this, I think perhaps Jesus, despite the agony through which he was going, shifted his body a little bit and turned in the direction of the repenting thief, perhaps with a slight smile of victory on his face.

The word *Paradise* comes from a Persian word that means *a walled garden*. Sometimes in the Bible it refers to the place where Christians go immediately after death. In other places it seems to refer to an intermediate state of the departed before they actually get to heaven. Sometimes it is actually referring to heaven. In any case paradise means to be in the immediate presence of the risen Christ.

At twelve o'clock noon, the sixth hour, the sky suddenly became dark and there was an earthquake. Then the Bible leaves us with a silence of three hours. We know absolutely nothing about what happened during those three hours between twelve noon and three in the afternoon, the ninth. It would be safe to assume that during that period our Lord was burdened with an unbelievable weight — my sin, your sin,

and the sin of the entire world. He was alone and despaired even of the presence of the Father: "Eli, Eli, la ma sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46).

Perhaps Ira D. Sankey expressed the unknown events of these three dreadful hours better than anyone with the music he wrote for a little poem he had read in the newspaper entitled "The Ninety and Nine." The words had been written by a twenty-one year old woman named Elizabeth Clephane who died two years before the hymn was ever published. Sankey composed the music on a little organ that I played when it belonged to the Carrubber's Close Mission in Edinburgh. I think it is now in the Billy Graham Centre at Wheaton, Illinois. Sankey was world renowned, but the Scottish author was almost unknown. The third verse of her poem expresses some of the darkness that surrounded our Lord during those final three hours on the cross:

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed:
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed thro'
Ere he found his sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert he heard its cry —
Sick and helpless, and ready to die,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.

After Jesus had been hanging on the cross for six hours he decided it was time to die. It is important we remember that the Roman soldiers did not kill him, nor did the Jewish religious leaders authorize his death. He made it very clear to his disciples that when the time came he would give his own life voluntarily for the sins of the world: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:17-18).

Finally he cried out in a loud, and I believe, an extremely victorious voice: "It is finished!" Far away in the temple in Jerusalem the great veil that separated the "holy place" from the "holy of holies" was ripped from top to bottom. Only the High Priest was allowed to go through the temple veil, and

that was only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. The High Priest went in on this very special day to make a sacrifice to God for himself, for all the other priests, and for the people.

The veil was now torn open as a symbol that any repentant and believing sinner could enter into the most intimate communion with God — at any time, without the help of a minister, a pastor or a priest: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Heb. 10:19-20).

Conclusion

This repentant thief had been a thug only twelve hours earlier, but he confessed his sin, repented and reached out to Jesus: “Remember me.” I am sure he was thinking of some time in the distant future, perhaps on the day of resurrection. However, he received a great deal more than he requested. Jesus replied it would not be “when” but “today.” That very day he would be with Jesus, and wherever Jesus is must be Paradise.

The salvation of this reprobate man at the very last minute should be a great source of encouragement to pastors all over the world. Even the person who has not been a *professor* in the Christian faith for most of his life may have accepted Christ during the final seconds before he went to meet his Maker. William Camden, the British author, said it well during the latter part of the 16th Century:

Be 'twixed the stirrup and the ground,
Mercy I ask'd; mercy I found.

Often we are called upon to conduct the funeral of a person who has made no profession of faith whatsoever. This is a very difficult thing for any minister to do. However, we should be very careful we do not assume the person is a lost soul. Nobody knows what may have transpired in the heart of such a person in the seconds before it stopped beating.

Sometimes we use this benediction: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be

glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

These words simply must include the final seconds of faith, even in the life of the most rabid infidel.

1. Chester W. New and Charles E. Phillips, *Ancient and Medieval History* (Toronto, Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited and J.M. Dent & Sons, Limited, 1941), pg. 231.

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three-score furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

Luke 24:13-18

Chapter 24

Sad People Rejoice

We are indebted to Luke almost exclusively for the account of our Lord's post-resurrection appearance to two of the disciples on the road to a village called Emmaus. It is true that Mark refers to the incident, but he does not even give the name of the village. In the King James Version of the English Bible, Mark uses only two verses and 32 words which include very few details. On the other hand Luke uses 23 verses and approximately 494 English words to tell the story, and he is the only one that gives us the name of the village. Once again we see that Luke had an exclusive quality about the writing of his gospel. He includes many important items that are not mentioned at all by the other writers. (These have already been identified in chapter 9.)

As indicated, this story of our Lord's appearance to the two people on the road to Emmaus is one of those stories for

which we are almost entirely indebted to Luke. We know almost nothing about the village of Emmaus except that it was almost seven miles distance from Jerusalem, or about 60 furlongs — one furlong equals 202 yards. We do not know whether these two were heading north, south, east or west from Jerusalem. We have no idea about the population of Emmaus. Two of our Lord's disciples were walking from Jerusalem towards Emmaus. One was a man and his name was given as Cleopas, but we do not know the name of the other person or even whether it was a man or a woman. I would like to think they were man and wife and that they were on their way home. Perhaps their home was a house or it could even have been an inn. They started out from Jerusalem at about noon on the third day after the crucifixion.

At this time there was no real hard evidence that Jesus had actually been resurrected from the grave. Two or three of the women who had gone to anoint his body saw the empty tomb, as did Peter, and the women to whom he appeared were not at all sure that it was Jesus whom they had seen. The stories in the gospels are filled with words such as: "And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted . . . And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not . . . And they went out and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them . . . Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and unbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen . . . And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not . . . But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit . . . And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat" (Mt. 28:17, Mk. 16:11,13,14, Lk. 24:11,37,41).

Sadness Among the Inside Circle

"And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" (Lk. 24:17). These two on the road to Emmaus shared the sadness that had completely overwhelmed all of the inside circle of the followers of Jesus. Up until noon hour of the third day after the crucifixion they were not at all sure Jesus

had in fact risen. Even those two or three who saw him were beginning to have doubts about what they had seen.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, had watched her son dying as a criminal, and when she saw the Roman soldier pierce his body with a spear she felt as if her own heart had been pierced. She may have remembered the day she had taken him to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as an infant, and the words of Simeon came back to her: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34-35).

The 13th century poet, Jacapone da Todi, has expressed it beautifully in a poem still used by the Roman Catholic church as part of their liturgy:

Stabat Mater Dolorosa

At the cross her station keeping
Stood the mournful mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last;
Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
All his bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword had passed.

Some of the other women on the inside circle of disciples were also greatly saddened. Some of these people had been with Jesus continuously just as much as the twelve disciples. They had followed him to Galilee — Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. They had come with heavy hearts, not to see the risen Lord, but to anoint the body of the dead Jesus. No, the cross had blasted their hopes and the grave had buried their expectations in its awesome finality.

There were only eleven of the original twelve disciples now that Judas had committed suicide. They had taken refuge behind the closed door of a house because they were afraid of reprisals by the Jews. For the past three years they had been riding the crest of a popularity wave, but now their hopes were totally crushed. They would have to face many of the same people who had seen them with Jesus and admit they were wrong.

The two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus were also overcome with the great burden of sadness that all of these others shared.

No Recognition

When Jesus appeared to these two disciples on their way to Emmaus they did not recognize him: "But their eyes were holden that they should not know him" (Lk. 24:16). This was also true of Mary Magdalene when she first saw Jesus after the resurrection: "And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus" (Jn. 20:14). Some of the disciples had exactly the same experience when they saw Jesus at the Sea of Tiberias. They had gone fishing and had failed to catch anything and when they returned they saw Jesus on the shore: "But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus" (Jn. 21:4).

It may be that for some reason their physical eyes could not recognize the resurrected body of Jesus when they did see him, or perhaps they were so consumed with grief they did not see anything or anybody clearly. It seems quite clear that none of them really expected they would ever see Jesus again. If they had seen him, they would have brushed the image away and assumed dead men do not walk on a country road or stand on the shore of the sea. They were obviously not expecting to see him.

Sometimes the same sort of thing happens to us. We think of Jesus in terms of royalty — the Rock of Ages, the Great Physician, the King of Kings, the Saviour of the World, or we think of the Saviour in the same manner as some of the great artists of the world have thought of him — that is, with a halo.

Often we fail to see him in the little things in life. Jesus talked about his second coming and the establishment of his Kingdom, and he makes the following statement: "Then shall the King say unto them, on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we

thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mt. 25:34-40).

When we give an offering in our churches, how important it is for us to remember we are not giving it to the pastor or the church. We are giving it to Jesus Christ. How different would giving be for most of us if we remembered this! How often it is we become so completely preoccupied with our own grief or our own activity that we fail to reach out a helping hand to others, and in so doing, we fail to come into contact with Jesus Christ.

Heart Burn Becomes an Invitation

Assuming that Jesus may have joined them in the early part of their trip to Emmaus, he must have been with them for at least two hours and perhaps four. It was a journey of seven miles and even if they walked rapidly, it would have taken them two hours. If they carried on an animated conversation, they would have walked much more slowly, and the journey may have taken them nearly four hours. During that time Jesus talked to them about the Scriptures: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk. 24:27).

Undoubtedly they asked questions as Jesus talked to them, and after he had left them they remembered the warmth of his presence: "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk. 24:32). Apparently their hearts were so warmed and his presence blessed them so much they invited him to come in and share a meal with them: "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them" (Lk. 24:29). What a benediction it must have been to this couple as the sun was setting on that particular day to have Jesus with them!

All of us will reach a time in our lives when, for us, it is "toward evening, and the day is far spent." We are all aware

that there may not be many days left in our lives. Even in the vigour of youth life is extremely uncertain and may be snatched away. Just two weeks before this day when I am writing these lines one of our young men — only in his mid-thirties — was stopped on his motorcycle waiting for the light to change when a stolen car, driven by a very drunk driver, ran into him from the rear. He was killed almost instantly.

However, those of us who are in the category of seniors are very much aware that there *cannot* be many days left. As life moves on it would be well for us to ask the question that God asked of Jeremiah, the Prophet: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? (Jer. 12:5).

If you cannot cope with your present problems how do you expect to manage when the problems get worse? Some of us may be very close to the "swelling of Jordan" in our lives. The closer we get to the river of death the more serious our problems may be. We often talk to the people who have lived to a "good old age", but there are many aspects of old age which are not good. We begin to suffer all sorts of losses. Our eyes grow dim, our ears become less alert and sometimes our locomotion is severely strained. We need to remember the secular song: "The Old Grey Mare, She Ain't What She Used To Be." As our faculties begin to go, we become aware that we are living in a world in which we are not as important as we used to be. We have fewer friends who are in our own generation. There is no one with whom we can really share our problems, and as we face the "swellings of Jordan" perhaps as at no other time we must have the abiding presence of the Lord.

From Invitation To Recognition

"And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight" (Lk. 24:30-31).

We do not know why Cleopas and his wife did not recognize Jesus when he first joined them on the road to Emmaus, nor do we know what really happened that made

them recognize him after they had begun to eat together. Perhaps when he asked the blessing he used some form of prayer peculiar to him, or it may have been they noticed his hands for the first time when he broke the bread, and they were able to see the scars the nails had left. At any rate their eyes were suddenly opened and they knew him, and at that instant he vanished completely. I can imagine the cries of joy which came from these two people when they recognized their Lord: "It's him! It's him! Jesus lives! Life is going to be worth living after all. All things do indeed work together for good. Because he lives, we can be assured that we too shall live. The curse on the universe shall be lifted. There is going to be a new heaven and a new earth. Hope lives again!"

They were so excited that even though it was now dark outside they headed back towards Jerusalem. It would have been later than nine o'clock by the time they reached the city and it could have been almost midnight. They made their way directly to the place where the disciples had shut themselves in because they were afraid, and as they burst through the door they shouted "the Lord is risen indeed."

Conclusion

Even though Cleopas and his wife did not recognize Jesus when he joined them on the path, their hearts burned within them as he explained all the teachings about himself in the Old Testament Scriptures. Then they pressed him to stay with them at the end of the journey. If they had not done so their chance might have been gone: "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us" (Lk. 24:29).

It was this story in the Gospel of Luke that inspired Henry Francis Lyte to write the words of the immortal hymn, "Abide With Me." It was in 1847 just before he retired from his parish at Lower Brixham where he had served for 23 years. He was about to journey through southern France in an attempt to regain his health. His health did not last. He died before the end of that year, but his hymn has lasted for 143 years and will probably be a benediction to many people until the Lord returns.

Abide with me — fast falls the even tide,
The darkness deepens — Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

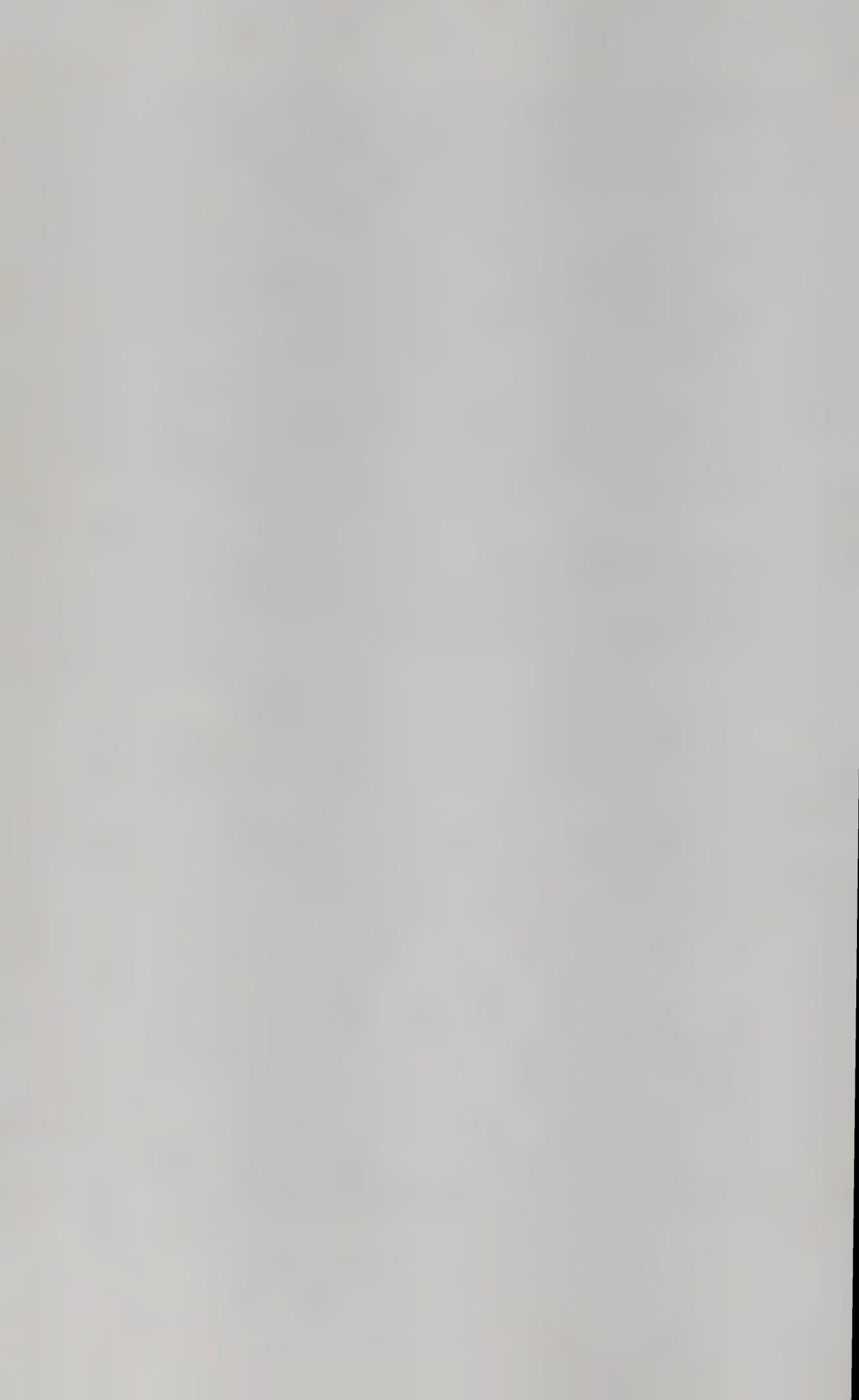
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see —
O thou who changest not, abide with me!

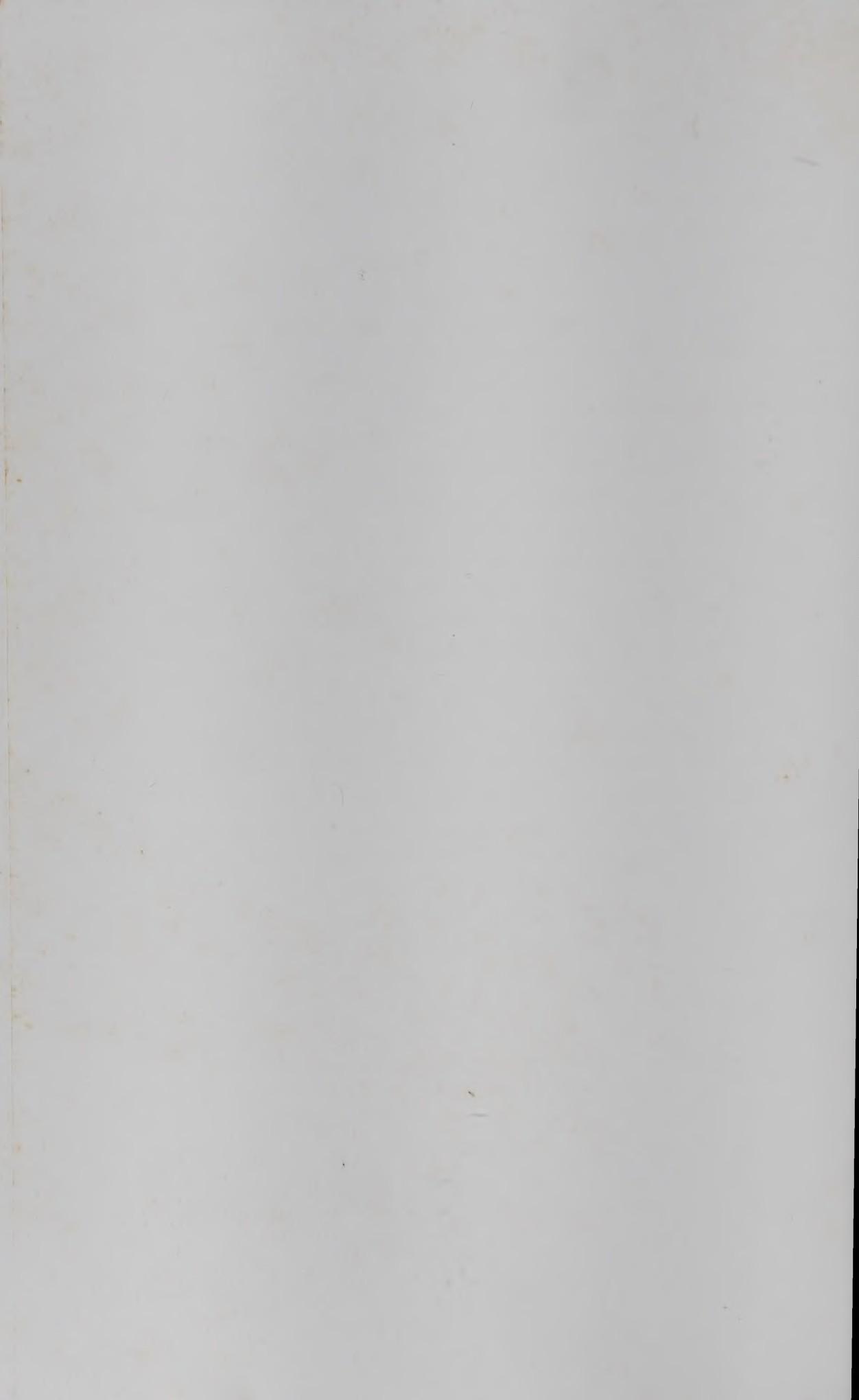
I need thy presence every passing hour —
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Thru cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!

I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if thou abide with me.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

“Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” (Lk. 24:29).





JESUS, BY LUKE

The writers of the four Gospels observed the life of Christ from different standpoints: Matthew saw Jesus through Jewish eyes; Mark, who drew on Peter's preaching, had the eyes of a pragmatist; Luke's view was that of a Gentile; and John, who saw with eyes of faith, saw Jesus as Lord.

These four companion volumes by Dr. Paul B. Smith provide an excellent reference for pastors and teachers and will enrich one's personal study of the Gospels.

Dr. Paul B. Smith is senior minister of the world-famous Peoples Church in Toronto, Canada. His other books include *The Revelation*, *The Senders*, *Church on the Brink*, and *Daily Gospel*.

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